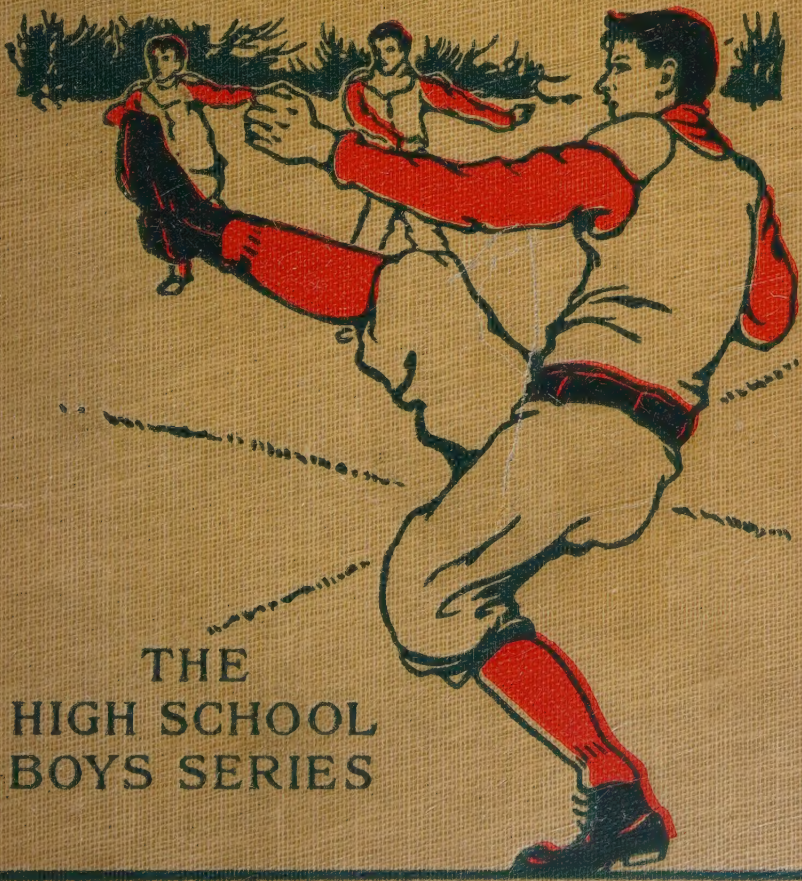
The HIGH·SCHOOL ·LEFT·END·

H·IRVING·HANCOCK



THE
HIGH SCHOOL
BOYS SERIES

Walter B. Nolt

CHS-(16)A

"You Young Puppy!" Cried Dodge.

Frontispiece.

The High School Left End

OR

Dick & Co. Grilling on the Football Gridiron

By

H. IRVING HANCOCK

Author of The High School Freshmen, The High School Pitcher, The Motor Boat Club Series, Etc., Etc.

Illustrated

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CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	Sulking in the Football Camp	7
II.	The Start of the Dodge Mystery	22
III.	Dick Stumbles on Something	32
IV.	The "Soreheads" in Conclave	53
V.	At the End of the Trail	62
VI.	The Small Soul of a Gentleman	70
VII.	The Football Notice Goes Up	76
VIII.	Dick Fires Both Barrels	87
IX.	Bayliss Gets Some Advice	95
X.	Two Girls Turn the Laugh	108
XI.	Does Football Teach Real Nerve	120
XII.	Dick, Like Cæsar, Refuses the Crown	130
XIII.	Bert Dodge "Starts Something"	137
XIV.	The "Strategy" of a School Traitor	146
XV.	A "Fear" for the Plotter	154
XVI.	"The Cattle Car for Yours"	164
XVII.	Facing the "School Cut"	177
XVIII.	"Prin." Gets in the Practice	183
XIX.	Laura and Belle Have a Secret	195
XX.	In the Line of Daring	204
XXI.	The Price of Bravery	213
XXII.	The Thanksgiving Day Game	221
XXIII.	Sulker and Real Man	232
XXIV.	Conclusion	241

The High School Left End

CHAPTER I

SULKING IN THE FOOTBALL CAMP

"FOOTBALL is all at sixes and sevens this year," muttered Dave Darrin disconsolately.

"I can tell you something more than that," added Tom Reade mysteriously.

"What?" asked Dick Prescott, looking at Reade with interest, for it was unusual for Reade to employ that tone or air.

"Two members of the Athletics Committee have intimated to Coach Morton that they'd rather see football passed by this year."

"*What?*" gasped Dick. He was staring hard now.

"Fact," nodded Tom. "At least, I believe it to be a fact."

"There must be something wrong with that news," put in Greg Holmes anxiously.

"No; I think it's all straight enough," persisted Tom, shaking his head to silence Holmes.

"It came to me straight enough, though I don't feel at liberty to tell you who told me."

All six members of Dick & Co. were present. The scene of the meeting was Dick Prescott's own room at his home over the bookstore kept by his parents. The hour was about nine o'clock in the evening. It was Friday evening of the first week of the new school year. The fellows had dropped in to talk over the coming football season, because the week had been one of mysterious unrest in the football squad at Gridley High School.

Just what the trouble was, where it lay or how it had started was puzzling the whole High School student body. The squad was not yet duly organized. This was never attempted until in the second week of the school year. Yet it was always the rule that the new seniors who, during their junior year, had made good records on either the school eleven, or the second eleven, should form the nucleus of the new pigskin squad. Added to these, were the new juniors, formerly of the sophomore class, who had shown the most general promise in athletics during the preceding school year.

Gridley High School aimed to lead—to be away at the top—in all school athletics. The "Gridley spirit," which would not accept de-

feat in sports, was proverbial throughout the state.

And so, though the football squad was not yet formally organized for training and practice, yet, up to the last few days, it had been expected that a finer gridiron crowd than usual would present itself for weeding, sifting and training by Coach Morton. The latter was also one of the submasters of Gridley High School.

Since the school year had opened, however, undercurrent news had been rife that there would be many "soreheads," and that this would be an "off year" in Gridley football. Just where the trouble lay, or what the "kick" was about, was a puzzle to most members of the student body. It was an actual mystery to Dick & Co.

"What is all the undermining row about, anyway?" demanded Dick, looking around at his chums. Dick was pacing the floor. Dave, Tom and Greg Holmes were seated on the edge of the bed. Dan Dalzell was lying back in the one armchair that the room boasted. Harry Hazelton was standing by the door.

"I can't make a single thing out of it all," sighed Dan. "All I can get at is that some of the seniors and some of our class, the juniors, are talking as though they didn't care about playing this year. I know that Coach Morton

is worried. In fact, he's downright disheartened."

"Surely," interjected Dick, "Mr. Morton must have an idea of what is keeping some of the fellows back from the team?"

"If he does know, he isn't offering any information," returned Harry Hazelton.

"I don't see any need for so much mystery," broke in Dave Darrin, in disgust.

"Well, there is a mystery about it, anyway," contended Tom Reade.

"Then, before I'm much older, I'm going to know what that mystery is," declared Dick.

"You're surely the one of our crowd who ought to be put on the trail of the mystery," proposed Dalzell, with a laugh.

"Why?" challenged Prescott.

"Why, you're a reporter on 'The Blade.' Now mysteries are supposed to constitute the especial field of reporters. So, see here, fellows, I move that we appoint Dick Prescott a committee of one for Dick & Co., his job being to find out what ails football—to learn just what has made football sick this year."

"Hear! Hear!" cried some of the others.

"Is that your unanimous wish, fellows?" asked Dick, smiling.

"It is," the others agreed.

"Very good, then," sighed Prescott. "At

no matter what personal cost, I will find the answer for you."

This was all in a spirit of fun, as the chums understood. Yet this lightly given promise was likely to involve Dick Prescott in a good deal more than he had expected.

Readers of the preceding volumes in this series know Dick & Co. so well that an introduction would be superfluous. Those to whom the pages of "The High School Freshmen" are familiar know how Dick & Co., chums from the Central Grammar School, entered Gridley High School in the same year. How the boys toiled through that first year as half-despised freshmen, and how they got some small share in school athletics, even though freshmen were not allowed to make the school athletic teams, has been told. The pranks of the young freshmen are now "old tales." How Dick Prescott, with the aid of his chums, put up a hoax that fairly scared the Board of Education out of its purpose to forbid High School football does not need telling again. Our former readers are also familiar with the enmity displayed by Fred Ripley, son of a wealthy lawyer, and the boomerang plot of Ripley to disgrace Prescott and brand the latter as a High School thief. The same readers will recall the part played in this plot by Tip Scammon, worthless son of the hon-

est old High School janitor, and how Tip's evil work resulted in his going to the penitentiary for the better part of a year.

Readers of "The High School Pitcher" will recollect how, in their sophomore year, Dick & Co. made their first real start in High School athletics; how Dick became the star pitcher for the nine, and how the other chums all found places on the nine, either as star players or as "subs." In this volume also was told the story of Fred's moral disasters under the tyranny of Tip Scammon, who threatened to "tell." How Dick & Co. were largely entitled to the credit for bringing the Gridley High School nine through a season's great record on the diamond was all told in this second volume. Dick's good fortune in getting a position as "space" reporter on "The Morning Blade" was also described, and some of his adventures as reporter were told. The culmination of Fred Ripley's scoundrelism, and his detection by his stern old lawyer father, were narrated at length. Perhaps many of our readers will remember, first of all, the tremendous "pennies" hoax on the unpopular principal of the High School, Mr. Abner Cantwell; and the swimming episode, in which every High School boy took part, afterwards meekly awaiting the impossible expulsion of all the boys of the High School student body.

Our readers will recall that Mr. Cantwell had succeeded the former principal, Dr. Thornton, whom the boys had almost idolized, and that much of Mr. Cantwell's trouble was due to his ungovernable temper.

During the first two years of High School life, Dick & Co. had become increasingly popular. True, since these six chums were all the sons of families in very moderate circumstances, Dick & Co. had been disliked by some of the little groups of students who came from wealthier families, and who believed that High School life should be rather governed by a select few representing the more "aristocratic" families of the little city.

Good-humored avoidance is excellent treatment to accord a snob, and this, as far as possible, had been the plan of Dick & Co. and of the other average boy at the High School.

"Let us see," broke in Dick, suddenly, "who are the soreheads in the football line?"

"Well, Davis and Cassleigh, of the senior class, for two," replied Dave Darrin.

"Dodge, Fremont and Bayliss, also first classmen," suggested Reade.

"Trenholm and Grayson, also seniors," brought in Greg Holmes.

"Then there are Porter, Drayne and Whit-

ney," added Dave. "They're of this year's juniors."

"And Hudson and Paulson, also of our junior class," nodded Harry Hazelton.

Dick Prescott had rapidly written down the names. Now he was studying the list carefully.

"They're all good football men," sighed Dick. "All men whose aid in the football squad is much needed."

"Drayne is the stuck-up chap, who uses the broad 'a' in his speech, and carries his nose up at an angle of forty-five degrees," chuckled Dan Dalzell. "He's the fellow I mortally offended by nicknaming him 'Sewers,' to mimic his name of 'Drayne.' "

"That wouldn't be enough to keep him out of football," remarked Dave quietly.

Dick looked up suddenly from his list.

"Fellows," he announced, "I've made one discovery."

"Out with it!" ordered Dan.

"Perhaps you can guess for yourselves what I have just found."

"We can't," admitted Hazelton meekly. "Please tell us, and save us racking our brains."

"Well, it's curious," continued Dick slowly, "but every one of these fellows—I believe

you've given me all the names of the 'soreheads'?"

"We have," affirmed Tom Reade.

"Well, I've just noted that every fellow on my sorehead roll of honor belongs to one of our families of wealth in Gridley."

Dick paused to look around him, to see how the announcement impressed his chums.

"Do you mean," hinted Hazelton, "that the soreheads are down on football because they prefer automobiles?"

"No." Dick Prescott shook his head emphatically.

"By Jove, Dick, I believe you're right," suddenly exclaimed Dave Darrin.

"So you see my point, old fellow?"

"I'm sure I do."

"I'm going to get examined for spectacles, then," sighed Dan plaintively. "I can't see a thing."

"Why, you ninny," retorted Dave scornfully, "the football 'soreheads' have been delevoping that classy feeling. They wear better clothes than we do, and have more pocket money. Many of their fathers don't work for a living. In other words, the fellows on Dick's list belong to what they consider a privileged and aristocratic set. They're the Gridley bluebloods—or think they are—and they don't intend to play on any

football eleven that is likely to have Dick & Co. and a few other ordinary muckers on it."

"Muckers?" repeated Harry Hazelton flaring up.

"Cool down, dear chap, *do!*" urged Darrin, soothingly. "I don't mean to imply that we really are muckers, but that's what some of the classy group evidently consider us."

"Why, they say that Cassleigh's grandfather was an Italian immigrant, who spelled his name Casselli," broke in Dan Dalzell.

"I believe it, son," nodded Dave. "Old Casselli was an immigrant and an honest fellow. But he had the bad judgment to make some money in the junk business, and sent his son to college. The son, after the old immigrant died, took to spelling his name Cassleigh, and the grandson is the prize snob of the town."

"And Bayliss's father was indicted by the grand jury, seven or eight years ago, for bribery in connection with a trolley franchise," muttered Greg Holmes.

"Also currently reported to be true, my infant," nodded Dave sagely. "But the witnesses against the elder Bayliss skipped, and the district attorney never brought the case to trial. Case was quashed a year later, and so now the Baylisses belong to the Distinguished Order of Unconvicted Boodlers. That trolley stock

jumped to six times its par value right after the case against Bayliss was dropped, you know."

"And, from what I've heard Mr. Pollock say at 'The Blade' office," Dick threw in, "the fathers of one or two of the other soreheads got their money in devious ways."

"Why, there's Whitney's father," laughed Dan Dalzell. "Did you ever hear how he got his start thirty years ago? Whitney's brother-in-law got into financial difficulties, and transferred to the elder Whitney property worth a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. When the financial storm blew over the brother-in-law wanted the property transferred back again, but the elder Whitney didn't see it that way. The elder Whitney kept the transferred property, and has since increased it to a half million or more."

"Oh, well," Dick interrupted, "let us admit that some of the fellows on the sorehead list have never been in jail, and have never been threatened with it. But I am sure that Dave has guessed my meaning right. The soreheads, who number a dozen of rather valuable pigskin men, are on strike just because some of us poorer fellows are in it."

"What nonsense!" ejaculated Greg Holmes disgustedly. "Why, Purcell isn't in any such crowd. Of course, Purcell's father isn't rich

beyond the dreams of avarice, but the Purcells, as far as blood goes, are head and shoulders above the families of any of the fellows on Dick's little list."

"If that's really what the disagreement is over," drawled Dan, "I see an easy way out of it."

"Go ahead," nodded Dick.

"Let the 'soreheads' form the Sons of Taxpayers Eleven, and we'll organize a Sons of poor but Honest Parents Eleven. Then we'll play them the best two out of three games for the honor of representing Gridley High School this year."

"Bright, but not practicable," objected Dick patiently. "The trouble is that, if two such teams were formed and matched, neither team, in the event of its victory, would have all of the best gridiron stuff that the High School contains. No, no; what we want, if possible, is some plan that will bring the whole student body together, all differences forgotten and with the sole purpose of getting up the best eleven that Gridley can possibly send out against the world."

"Well, we are willing," remarked Darrin grimly.

"No! No, we're not," objected Hazelton fiercely. "If the snobs don't want to play with

any of us on the team, then we don't want to play if *they* come in."

"Gently, gently!" urged Dick. "Think of the honor of your school before you tie your hands up with any of your own mean, small pride. Our whole idea must be that Gridley High School is to go on winning, as it has always done before. For myself, I had hoped to be on the eleven this year. Yet, if my staying off the list will put Gridley in the winning set, I'm willing to give up my own ambitions. I'm going to put the honor of the school first, and myself somewhere along about fourteenth."

"That's the only talk," approved Dave promptly. "Gridley must have the winning football eleven."

"Well, the whole thing is a shame," blazed Reade indignantly.

"Oh, well, don't worry," drawled Dan Dalzell. "Keep cool, and the whole thing will be fixed."

"Fixed?" insisted Reade. "How? How will it be fixed?"

"I don't know," Dan confessed, stifling a yawn behind his hand. "Just leave the worry alone. Let Dick fix it."

"How can you fix it?" asked Reade, turning upon their leader.

"I don't know—yet," hesitated Prescott.

"But, like Dan, I believe there's a way to be found."

"Going?" asked Hazelton. "Well, I'll trot along, too."

"Yes," nodded Greg. "It's a shame to stay here, hardening Dick's mattress when he ought to be lying on it himself. It's time we were all in bed. Good night, Dick, old fellow."

Four of the boys were speedily gone. Darrin, however, remained behind, though he intended to stay only a few minutes. The two were earnestly discussing the squally football "weather" when the elder Prescott's voice sounded from the foot of the stairs.

"Dick?"

"Yes, sir," answered the boy, throwing open the door and springing to the head of the stairs.

"Mr. Bradley, of 'The Blade,' wants to talk with you over the 'phone. In a hurry, too, he says."

"I'll be right there, Dad. Coming, Dave?"

Darrin nodding, the two chums ran down the stairs to the bookstore. Dick caught up the transmitter and answered.

"That you, Dick?" sounded the impatient voice of News Editor Bradley.

"This is Dick Prescott, Mr. Bradley."

"Then, for goodness' sake, can you hustle up here?"

"Of course I can."

"Ask your father if you can take up a late night job for me. Then come on the jump. My men are all out, and everything is at odds and ends in the way of news. I can't get a single man, and I wish I had three at this minute."

"Dave Darrin is here. Can I bring him along?"

"Yes; he's not a reporter—but he may be able to help. Hustle."

"I'll be walking in through the doorway," laughed Dick, "by the time you've hung your transmitter up. Good-bye." Ting-a-ling-ling! "Now, Dave, get your father on the jump, and ask his leave to go out on a late night story with me."

Fortunately there was no delay about this. Dave received the permission from home promptly enough. The two youngsters set out on a run.

What healthy boy of sixteen doesn't love to prowl late at night? It is twentyfold more fascinating when there's a mystery on tap, and a newspaper behind all the curiosity.

The longing of these sturdy chums for mystery and adventure was swiftly to be gratified —perhaps more so than they could have wished!

News Editor Bradley was waiting for them in the doorway of "The Blade" office, a frown on the journalistic face.

CHAPTER II

THE START OF THE DODGE MYSTERY

"THIS is the way it always goes," jerked out Bradley, as the two High School boys hurried into the office after him. "One of my men is sick, and the other two are somewhere—where, I can't find out."

"All" his men sounded large enough; as a matter of fact, the only reporters "The Blade" employed were three young men on salary, and Dick Prescott, mainly as gleaner of school news. Dick didn't receive any salary, but was paid a dollar a column.

"What's happening, anyway?" Dick asked coolly.

"You know Theodore Dodge?" demanded Mr. Bradley.

"I know him when I see him; he never talks with me," Prescott replied.

"Theodore Dodge is the father of a fellow in our senior class at High School," Dave put in, adding under his breath, "and the son is one of our football 'soreheads.'"

"Dodge has vanished," continued Bradley. "He went out early this morning, and hasn't been seen since. To-night, just after dark, a man walking by the river, up above the bend, picked up a coat and hat on the bank. Letters in the pocket showed the coat to be Mr. Dodge's. The finder of the coat hurried to the Dodge house, and Mrs. Dodge hurriedly notified the police, asking Chief Coy to keep the whole matter quiet. Jerry (Chief Coy) doesn't know that we have a blessed word about this. But Jerry, his plain clothes man, Hemingway, and two other officers are out on the case. They have been on the job for nearly three hours. So far they haven't learned a word. They can't drag the river until daylight comes. Now, Prescott, what occurs to you as the thing to do?"

"I guess the only thing," replied Dick quietly, "is to find Theodore Dodge."

Mr. Bradley gasped.

"Well, yes; you have the right idea, young man. But can you find Dodge, Dick?"

"When do you go to press?"

"Latest at four o'clock in the morning."

"I think I can either find Theodore Dodge, or else find where he went to," Prescott replied, slowly. "Of course, that's brag—not promise."

"You get us the story—straight and in de-

tail," cried Bradley, eagerly, "and there'll probably be a bit extra in it for you—a good bit, perhaps. If Dodge doesn't turn up without sensation this is going to be our big story for a week. Dodge, you know, is vice-president and actual head of the Second National Bank."

"Whew!" thought Dave Darrin, to himself. "It's easy enough for any suspicious person to imagine a story! But it might not be the right one."

"Some time ago," asked Dick thoughtfully, "didn't you publish a story about some of the big amounts of insurance carried by local rich men?"

"Yes," nodded Bradley.

"I think you stated that Theodore Dodge carried more than any other citizen of Gridley."

"Yes; he carries a quarter of a million dollars of insurance."

"Is the insurance payable to his widow, or others—or to his estate?"

"I don't know," mused News Editor Bradley, a very thoughtful look coming into his face.

"Well, it's worth while finding out," pursued Dick. "See here, suppose Dodge has been using the bank's funds, and found himself in a corner that he couldn't get out of? Then, if the insurance money goes to his widow, it would be hers, and no court could take it from her for

the benefit of his creditors. If it goes to the estate, instead, then the insurance money, when paid over, could be seized and applied to cover any shortage of the missing man at the bank."

"So that——?" interrogated the news editor, his own eyes twinkling shrewdly.

"Why, in case—just in case, you understand —that Mr. Dodge has gone and gotten himself into trouble over the bank's funds, then it's probable that he has done one of two things. Either, in despair he has killed himself, so that either his widow or the bank will be protected. If the missing man didn't do away with himself, then probably he has put up the appearance of suicide in the hope that the officers of the law will be fooled off his trail, and that either a wronged bank or a deserted wife might get the insurance money. Of course, Mrs. Dodge might even be a party to a contemplated fraud, though that's not a fair inference against her unless something turns up to make it seem highly probable."

"My boy," cried Mr. Bradley admiringly, "you've all the instincts and qualities of the good newspaper man. I hope you'll take up the work when you get through the High School. But now to business!"

"Where do you want me to go? Where do you want me to take up the trail? Where it

started, just above the river bend? That's out in the country, a mile and a half from here."

"Darrin," begged the news editor, "won't you step to the 'phone and ring up Getchel's livery stable? Ask the man in charge to send a horse and buggy up here, and state that we want a horse with a little speed and a good deal of endurance."

While Dave was busy at the wire Dick and the news editor talked over the affair in low tones.

"With the horse you can cover a lot of ground," suggested Bradley. "And you're right about taking up the trail where it started. In half an hour, if you don't strike something big, you can drive back here on the jump for further orders. And don't forget the use of the 'phone, if you're at a distance. Also, if you strike something, and want to follow it further, you can have Darrin drive in with anything that you've struck up to the minute. Hustle, both of you. And, Darrin, we'll pay you for your trouble to-night."

Horse and buggy were soon at the door. Dick sprang in, picking up the reins. Dave leaped in at the other side. The horse started away at a steady trot.

"I hope those boys have brains enough not to go right past the story," mused Bradley, gazing

after the buggy before he went back to his desk. "But I guess Prescott always has his head squarely on his shoulders. He does, in school athletics, anyway. Len Spencer is the man for this job, so of course Len had to be laid up with a cold and fever that would make it murder to send him ought to-night."

"Dick," muttered Dave excitedly, "you've simply got to make good. This isn't simply a little paragraph to be scribbled. It's a mystery and is going to be the sensation of the day. This is the kind of story that full-fledged reporters on the great dailies have to handle."

"Yes," laughed Dick, "and those reporters never get flurried. I'm not going to allow myself any excitement, either."

"No, but you want to get the story—all of it."

"Of course I do," Prescott agreed quietly.

"If you do this in bang-up shape," Dave went on enthusiastically, "it's likely to be the making of you!"

"How?" queried Dick, turning around to his chum.

"Why, success on a big story would fairly launch you in journalism. It would provide your career as soon as you're through High School."

"I don't want a career at the end of the High

School course," Dick returned. "I'm going further, and try to fare better in life."

"Wouldn't you like to be a newspaper man for good?" demanded Dave.

"Not on a small-fry paper, anyway," replied Prescott. "Why, Bradley is news editor, and has been in the business for years. He gets about thirty dollars a week. I don't believe Pollock, who has charge of the paper, gets more than forty-five. That isn't return enough for a man who is putting in his whole life at the business."

"Thirty dollars has the sound of pretty large money," mused Dave. "As for forty-five, if that's what Mr. Pollock gets, look at the comfort he lives in at his club; and he's a real estate owner, too."

"Yes," Dick admitted. "But that's because Pollock follows two callings. He's an editor and a dealer in real estate. As for me, I'd rather put all my energies into one line of work."

"Then you believe you're going to earn more money than Pollock does?" questioned Dave, rather wonderingly.

"If I pick out a career for income," Dick responded, "I do intend to go in for larger returns. But I may go into another calling where the pay doesn't so much matter."

"Such as what?"

"Dave, old fellow, can you keep a secret?"

"Bosh! You know I can."

"A big secret?"

"Stop that!"

"Well, I'll tell you, Dave. By and by there are going to be, in this state, two appointments to cadetships at West Point. Our Congressman will have one appointment. Senator Alden will have the other. Now, in this state, appointments to West Point are almost always thrown open to competitive examination. All the fellows who want to go to West Point get together, at the call, and are examined. The fellow who comes off best is passed on to West Point to try his luck."

"And you think you can prove that you're the brightest fellow in the district?" laughed Dave good-humoredly.

"There are to be two chances, and I think I can prove that I'm one of the two brightest to apply. And Dave!"

"Well?"

"Why don't you go in to prove that you're the other brightest fellow. Just think! West Point! And the Army for a life career!"

"I think I'd rather scheme to go to the Naval Academy, and become an officer of the Navy," returned Dave slowly. "The big battleships

appeal to me more than does the saddle of the cavalryman."

"Go to Indianapolis?" muttered Dick, in near-disgust. "Well, I suppose that will do well enough for a fellow who can't get to West Point."

"Now, see here," protested Dave good-humoredly, though warmly, "you quit talking about Indianapolis. That's a favorite trick with fellows who are cracked on West Point. You know, as well as I do, that the Naval Academy is at Annapolis. There's a vacancy ahead for Annapolis, too."

"Oho! You've been thinking of that?" demanded Dick, again looking into his chum's eyes.

"Yes."

"And planning to go to Annapolis?"

"Yes; if I can come out best in a competitive examination of the boys of this district."

"Two secrets, then—yours and mine," grinned Prescott. "However, it'll be easier for you."

"Why?"

"There aren't so many fellows eager to go to the Naval Academy. It doesn't draw as hard as the Army does."

"The dickens it doesn't!" ejaculated Dave Darrin.

"No; the Navy doesn't catch young enthusiasm the way the Army does. You won't have so many fellows to compete with as I shall," said Dick.

"I'll have twice as many—three times as many," flared Darrin. "The Naval Academy is the only real and popular school in the United Service."

"Well, we won't quarrel," laughed young Prescott. "When the time comes we'll probably find smarter young fellows ahead of us, headed for both academies."

"If you do fail on West Point——?" quizzed Dave.

"*If* I do," declared Dick, with a very wistful emphasis on that "if," "then, after getting through High School I'll probably try to put in a year or two of hard work on 'The Blade,' to help my parents put me through college. They're anxious to make me a college man, and they'd work and save hard for it, but I wouldn't be much good if I didn't try to earn a lot of the expense money. One thing I'm resolved upon—I'm not going to go through life as a half-educated man. It is becoming more true, every year, that there's little show for the man with only the half-formed mind."

Then the two turned back to the subject that had brought them out on this September

night—the disappearance of Banker Theodore Dodge.

"In a minute or two we'll be in sight of the river bend," announced Darrin.

"There it is, now," nodded Dick, slowing down the horse and gazing over yonder. "Some one is there, and looking hard for something."

"Yes; I make out a couple of lanterns," assented Dave. "Well"—as Dick pulled in the horse—"aren't you going to drive over there?"

"That's what I want to think about," declared young Prescott. "I want to go at the job the right way—the way that real newspapermen would use."

CHAPTER III

DICK STUMBLES ON SOMETHING

A FEW moments later Dick Prescott guided the horse down a shaded lane. "Whoa!" he called, and got out.

"What, now?" questioned Darrin, as his chum began to hitch the horse to a tree.

"I'm going to prowl over by the bend, and see who's there and what they are doing."

Having tied the horse, Dick turned and nodded to his friend to walk along with him.

"You know Bradley told us," Prescott explained, "that the police do not know that Dodge's disappearance has leaked out to the press. Most folks in Gridley know that I write for 'The Blade.' So I'm in no hurry to show up among the searchers. I intend, instead, to see what they're doing. By going quietly we can approach, through that wood, and get close enough to see and hear without making our presence known."

"I understand," nodded Darrin.

Within two or three minutes the High School reporter and his chum had gained a point in the bushes barely one hundred and fifty feet away from where two men and a boy, carrying between them two lanterns, were closly examining the ground near the bank. One of the men was Hemingway, who was a sort of detective on the Gridley police force. The other man was a member of the uniformed force, though just now in citizen's dress. The boy was Bert Dodge, son of the missing banker, and one of the best football men of the senior class of Gridley High School.

"It's odd that we can't find where the trail leads to," the eavesdroppers heard Hemingway mutter presently.

"I'm afraid," replied young Dodge, with a slight choke in his voice, "that our failure is

due to the fact that water doesn't leave any trail."

"So you think your father drowned himself?" asked Hemingway, looking sharply at the banker's son.

"If he didn't, then some one must have pushed him into the river," argued Bert, in an unsteady voice.

"And I'm just about as much of the opinion," retorted Hemingway, "that your father left his hat and coat here, or sent them here, and didn't even get his feet wet."

"That's preposterous," argued the son, half indignantly.

"Well, there is the spot, right there, where the hat and coat were found. Now, for a hundred feet away, either up or down stream, the ground is soft. Yet there are no tracks such as your father would have left had he taken to the water close to where he left his discarded garments," argued Hemingway, swinging his lantern about.

"We've pretty well trodden down whatever footprints might have been here," disputed Bert Dodge. "I shan't feel satisfied until daylight comes and we've had a good chance to have the river dragged."

"Well, of course, it is possible you know of a reason that would make your father throw

himself into the river?" guessed Officer Hemingway, with a shrewd glance at the son.

"Neither my mother nor I know anything about my father that would supply a reason for his suicide," retorted Bert Dodge stiffly. "But I can't see any reason for believing anything except that my poor dad must now be somewhere in the river."

"We'll soon be able to do the best that we can do by night," rejoined Hemingway. "Chief Coy has gone after a gasoline launch that carries an electric search-light. As soon as he arrives we'll go all over the river, throwing the light on every part of the water in search of some further clue. There's no use, however, in trying to do anything more around here. We may as well be quiet and wait."

"I can't stand still!" sounded Dodge's voice, with a ring of anguished suspense in it. "I've got to keep hunting."

"Go ahead, then," nodded the detective. "We would, too, if there were anything further that could be looked into. But there isn't. I'm going to stop and smoke until the launch heaves in sight."

Both policemen threw themselves on the ground, produced pipes and fell to smoking. But Bert Dodge, with the restlessness of keen distress, continued to stumble on up and down

along the bank, flashing the lantern everywhere.

Presently Dodge was within sixty feet of where his High School mates crouched in hiding.

Suddenly the livery stable horse, some four or five hundred feet away, whinnied loudly, impatiently.

Natural as the sound was, young Dodge, in the tense state of his nerves, started and looked frightened.

"Wh-what was that?" he gasped.

"A horse," called Hemingway quietly. "Probably some critter passing on the road."

"I wish you'd see who's with that horse," begged young Dodge. "It may bring us news. I'm going, anyway."

With that, swinging the lantern, Bert Dodge started to cut across through the woods with its fringe of bushes.

Dave Darrin slipped away, and out of sight. Before Dick could do so, however, young Dodge, moving at a fast sprint, was upon him.

Bert stopped as though shot when he caught sight of the other boy.

"Dick Prescott?" he gasped.

"Yes," answered Dick quietly.

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to see what news there is about the finding of your father."

Hemingway had now reached the spot, with the other policeman some yards to the rear.

"You write for 'The Blade,' don't you?" challenged Bert.

"Yes," Dick assented.

"And 'The Blade' people sent you here?" cried Bert Dodge, in a voice haughty with displeasure.

"Perhaps 'The Blade' sent me here," Dick only half admitted.

"Sent you here to pry into other people's affairs and secrets," continued young Dodge impetuously. Then added, threateningly:

"Don't you dare to print a word about this affair!"

Dick looked quietly at young Dodge.

"Did you hear me?" demanded Bert.

"Yes."

"Then what's your answer?"

"That I heard you, Bert."

"You young puppy!" cried Dodge, advancing threateningly. "Don't you address me familiarly."

"I don't care anything about addressing you at all," retorted Prescott, flushing slightly under the insult. "At present I can make allowances for you, for I fully understand how anxious you are. But that is no real excuse for insulting me."

"Are you going to heed me when I tell you to print nothing about my father's disappearance?" insisted young Dodge.

"That is something over which you really have no control," Dick replied slowly, though not offensively. "I take all my orders from my employers."

"You young mucker!" cried Bert, in exasperation. "You print anything about our family misfortunes, and I'll thrash you until you can't see."

"I won't answer that," Dick replied, "until you make the attempt. But, see here, Dodge, you should try to keep cool, and as close to the line of gentlemanly speech and conduct as possible."

"A nice one you are, to lecture me on that subject," jeered Bert Dodge. "You—only a mucker! The son of——"

"Stop!" roared Dick, his face reddening. He advanced, his fists clenched. "If you're going to say anything against my father or mother, Bert Dodge, then stop before you say it! Before I break your neck!"

"Stop, both of you," interjected Hemingway, springing between the white-faced High School boys. "No blows are going to be struck while members of the police department are around. Dodge, of course, you're upset and nervous, but

you're not acting the way a gentleman should, even under such circumstances."

"Then drive that fellow away from here!" commanded Bert.

"I can't," confessed the officer. "He is breaking no law, and has as much right to be here as we have."

"Oh, he objects to my saying anything against his father or mother, but he's out tonight to throw all manner of slime on my father's name," contended Bert Dodge. His voice broke under the stress of his pent-up emotion.

"You're wrong there, Dodge," Dick broke in, forcing himself to speak calmly. "I'm here to gather the facts on a matter of news, but I am not out to throw any insinuations over your father, or anyone whose good name is naturally precious to you. Sometimes a reporter—even an amateur one—has to do things that are unpleasant, but they're all in the line of duty."

" 'The Blade' won't print a line about this matter," raged Bert tremulously. "Mr. Ripley is my father's friend, and his lawyer, too. Mr. Ripley will go to your editor, and let him know what is going to happen if that scurrilous sheet——"

Here Bert checked himself, for Dick had begun to smile coldly.

"Confound you!" roared Bert Dodge. He

leaped forward, intent on striking the young junior down. But Officer Hemingway pushed Dodge back forcefully.

"Come, come, now, Dodge, we won't have any of that," warned the officer. "And, if you want my opinion, you're not playing the part of a gentleman just now. Prescott understands your state of mind, however. He knows you're so upset, your mind so unhinged by the family trouble that you're doing and saying things that you'll be ashamed of by daylight."

"I suppose, next, you'll be inviting this reporter fellow to go on the boat with us when it comes," sneered Bert Dodge.

"That would be for the chief to say. Reporters are, usually, allowed to go with the police. Come, come, Dodge," urged Hemingway, laying a kindly hand on the young man's shoulder, "calm down and understand that Prescott is not offering to make any trouble, and that he has been very patient with a young fellow who finds himself in a heap of trouble."

"I can cut this short," offered Dick quietly. "I don't believe it would be worth my while, Mr. Hemingway, to ask the chief's permission to go on the boat with you. 'The Blade' can find out, later, whether you discover anything on the river."

"Where are you going, now?" demanded Bert unreasonably, as Prescott turned away.

"Back to the horse and buggy," Dick replied coolly.

"Then I'm going with you, and see you start back to town," asserted Bert Dodge.

Hemingway did not interfere, but, leaving his brother policeman at the river's edge, accompanied young Dodge. In a few minutes they arrived at the spot in the lane where Dick had tied the horse. Here they found Dave Darrin seated in the buggy. Dave glanced unconcernedly at them all, nodding to Hemingway, who returned the salutation.

"Now, I'll watch you start away from here," snapped Bert.

"All right, then," smiled Dick, climbing in, after unhitching, and picking up the reins. "I won't keep you long."

With that, and a parting word to the policeman, Dick Prescott drove away.

"I saw Hemingway coming, and knew you wouldn't need me," Dave explained with a laugh. "So, to save Bert a double attack of nerves, I slipped off in the darkness, and came here. But what on earth ails Dodge, anyway?"

"Why, for one thing, he's worried to death about the disappearance of his father," replied Dick Prescott.

"I've seen people awfully worried before, and yet it didn't make madmen of them," snorted Darrin.

"Well—perhaps——"

Dick hesitated.

"Well——?" Darrin insisted, rather impatiently.

"I'm half inclined to think that Bert Dodge has been leading the soreheads who sulk and won't play football in the same team with some of us common fellows," Dick laughed. "If so, the very fact of my being sent to look into the news side of his father's disappearance would make Bert feel especially sore at me."

"By George, you've hit the nail right on the head there," cried Dave. "That's the trouble. Bert has been leading a kick that was aimed very largely at Dick & Co., and now it almost puts him out of his head to find that Dick Prescott, of all the fellows in the school, has been sent by 'The Blade' to gather the facts concerning Theodore Dodge's mysterious disappearance—or death."

"Mr. Dodge isn't dead," replied Prescott slowly.

"What? And say! Do you realize, Dick, that you're letting the horse walk?"

"I intended to," returned Dick. "Whoa!"

"There's a boat coming up the river and

showing a search-light," broke in Dave, pointing.

"I saw it. That's why I stopped the horse. It must be Chief Coy's launch that he went after. Yes; there it is, putting in where we first saw Bert Dodge and the officers."

"Well, if you're not going to keep track of the launch, why don't you hit a fast gait for the office?" queried Darrin.

"There is plenty of time yet," Dick replied, "and we've nothing to report to the office yet. I'm just waiting for that boat to take on its passengers and get well away from the spot."

"Oh!" guessed Dave. "Then you're going back and make your own search of the place?"

"You're clever," nodded Prescott, with a low laugh. "Yes; it may be that Hemingway and his companion have made a fine search. Or it may be that they've missed clues that a blind man ought to see."

So the two High School boys sat there, in the buggy drawn up at the side of the road, for the next fifteen minutes. In that time the launch took on the waiting passengers, and the light played over all that part of the river, then started down stream.

Dick slowly headed the horse about, this time driving much closer to the river's bank than he had done before.

"There's a lantern under the seat, Dave. I saw it when we started from 'The Blade' office. Haul it out and light it, will you?"

For some minutes the two High School boys searched without much result. At last Dick and Dave began to move in wider circles, away from the much-tramped ground. Then, holding the lantern close to the ground, Prescott moved nearer and nearer to the railway track, all the while scanning the soil closely.

"Look there, Dave!" suddenly called Prescott. "No—don't look just yet," he added, holding the lantern behind him. "But tell me; you've often seen Mr. Dodge. What kind of boots did he wear?"

"Narrow, pointed shoes, and rather high heeled for a man to wear," Darrin answered.

"Exactly," nodded Dick. "Look there!"

Darrin bent down over a soft spot in the soil close to the railway roadbed. There were three prints of just such a boot as he had described.

"You see the small heel print," continued Prescott, in a whisper. "And you note that the front part of the foot makes a heavy impression, as it would when the foot is tilted forward by a high heel."

"I don't believe another man in the town ever wore a pair of boots such as made these prints," murmured Darrin excitedly. "And they're

headed away from the river, toward the railroad! And look here—other footprints of a different kind!"

"You're right!" cried Prescott, holding the lantern closer to the ground and scanning some additional marks in the soil. "Coarse shoes; one pair of 'em brogans! Mr. Dodge had companions when he went away from here."

"They may have been forcing the man somewhere with them," quivered Darrin, staring off into the black night about them.

"No; not a sign of a struggle," argued Dick, still with his gaze on the ground. "No matter who Mr. Dodge's companions were, he went with them willingly. Gracious, Dave, but we were right in believing the banker to be still alive! Coat and hat at the water's edge were a blind! Mr. Dodge has his own reasons for wanting people to think him dead. He has sloped away. Here's the track. Which way did he and the fellows go?"

"Away from Gridley," declared Darrin, sagely. "Otherwise, Mr. Dodge would have been seen by some one who would remember him."

"We'll go up along the track, then."

This they did, but the roadbed was hard. Besides, anyone walking on the ties would leave no trail. It was slow work, holding the lantern

close to the ground and scanning every step, besides swinging the lantern out to light up either side of their course. Yet both lads were so tremendously interested that they pushed on, heedless of the flight of time.

They had gone a mile or more up the track, "inching" it along, when they came upon an unmistakable print of Mr. Dodge's oddly pointed boot and narrow, high heel. They found, too, the print of a brogan within six feet of the same point.

"This is the way Dodge and his queer companions came," exulted Dave.

"But I don't believe they followed the track much further," argued Prescott, pointing ahead at the signal lights of a small crossing station. "If Mr. Dodge were trying to get away from public gaze he wouldn't go by a station where usually half a dozen loungers are smoking and talking with the station agent."

"We're lucky to have the trail this far," observed Dave Darrin. "But we can't follow it accurately at night. Say—gracious! Do you know what time it is? Half-past one in the morning!"

"Wow?" ejaculated Prescott, halting and looking dismayed. "It'll take us a good many minutes to get back to where we left the horse. It'll be after two o'clock when we hit 'The

Blade' office. Dave, we simply can't follow the trail further to-night. But we must strike it first thing in the morning. It'll be a big thing for 'The Blade' to be the folks to find the missing banker and clear the mystery up."

"Unless Dodge just kept on until he came to one of the stations, and took a train. Then the trail would be a long one."

"He didn't take a train to-night," returned Prescott, shaking his head. "If he wanted to disappear that would be the wrong way to go about it. He'd be recognized from the descriptions that will go about broadcast. No, sir! Mr. Dodge must be hiding in some of the big stretches of woods over yonder. A regiment could hide and be lost in the great woods."

"It's a trail I hate to leave," muttered Dave Darrin.

"But we've got to wait until daylight. We can't do much in the dark, anyway. I've got to get back to 'The Blade' office. Get your bearings here, Dave. To make doubly sure I'll cut a slice out of this tie to mark the place where we found this print, for it may be indistinct by daylight."

Marking the location Dick Prescott wheeled and began to hurry back, followed by Darrin. In due time they reached the buggy, took the light blanket from the horse, unhitched and

jumped in. Fast driving took them to "The Blade" office.

"You didn't learn anything, did you?" questioned Bradley.

"Yes; we did," Dick informed him. "The police, with their launch didn't get any trace of Mr. Dodge, did they?"

"No," admitted the news editor. "I've talked with Hemingway within the last hour. The police will begin dragging the river by daylight."

"They won't find the banker that way," chuckled Dick. "He's alive."

"Have you seen him?" demanded the news editor.

"No; and I'm not going to say too much now, either," returned Dick, with unusual stubbornness. "But 'The Blade' wants to take the keynote that Theodore Dodge is alive, and will turn up. I believe Dave and I are going to make him turn up during the next spell of daylight."

"We surely are!" laughed Darrin.

Mr. Bradley pressed them close with questions, but neither boy was inclined to reveal the secret of the trail along the railway roadbed.

"We're going to keep it all as our own scoop," Dick insisted. "And please, Mr. Bradley, don't post the police about our idea. If you do, the police will get the credit. If we keep

quiet, 'The Blade' will get all the credit that is coming.''

The news editor laid before Dick all the proofs and copy that had been prepared so far on the absorbing mystery of the night. Prescott made some newsy additions to the story, and through it all took the confident keynote that the vanished banker would soon be heard from in the flesh.

The work done, and Bradley having already seen to the return of the horse to the livery stable, Dick and Dave went into an unused room, where they threw themselves down on piles of old papers. Tired out, they slept without stirring. But they had left a note for the office boy who was due at six o'clock to sweep out the business office.

That office boy came in and called the High School pair at a few minutes after six. Dick's first thought was to instruct the boy to telephone the Prescott and Darrin homes at seven in the morning, sending word that the two boys were safe but busy. Then Dick hastily led the way to a quick-order restaurant near by. Here the boys got through with breakfast as quickly as they could. That done, they bought sandwiches, which they put into their pockets.

As they came out of the eating house the streets were still far from crowded. Laborers

were going to their toil, but it was yet too early for the business men of the city to be on their way to offices, or clerks to the stores.

"Now, let's get out of the town in a jiffy," proposed Dick. "We don't want to have many folks observing which way we go. We'll travel fast right up along the railway track."

Once started, the two boys kept going briskly. Both had been drowsy at the outset, but the impulse of discovery had them in its grip now, and fatigue was quickly forgotten.

Something more than half an hour after the start the boys halted beside the tie that Prescott had whittled in the dark a few hours before.

"There are the footprints," quivered Dave, staring hard.

"They're not as distinct as they were a few hours ago," replied Dick. "Still, I think we can follow them. I'm glad they lead toward the woods."

"Yes," Darrin agreed. "The direction of the footprints shows that Mr. Dodge and his companions didn't have any notion of boarding a train and getting out of this part of the world."

Yet, though both of these young newspaper hounds were keen to follow the trail, they did not find it any easy matter. Dick and Dave reached the edge of the woods. Then, for a

short time, they were obliged to explore carefully ere they came again upon one of the bootmarks of fastidious Banker Dodge. It was a hundred feet further on, in a bit of soft mould, that the next bootprint was found. Had these two High School boys been more expert trackers they would have found a fairly continuous trail, but their untrained eyes lacked the ability to see other signs that would have been evident to a plainsman.

So their progress was slow, indeed. They could judge only by the direction in which each last footprint was pointed, and they had to remember that one wandering through the woods might travel over a course whose direction frequently changed.

"Dave," whispered Prescott, "I think we had better separate a little. We might go along about a hundred feet apart. In that way there is more chance that we'll come sooner upon the next print."

They were perhaps six hundred feet into the woods, by this time, and stood looking down at the fifth footmark they had found.

"All right," nodded Darrin. "We're a pair of rank amateurs at this kind of work, anyway."

"Amateurs or not," murmured Dick, with a smile, "we seem to be the only folks in Grid-

ley who are on the right track in this mystery at present

"I'm full of misgivings, anyway," muttered Dave.

"Why?"

"I can't help feeling that we should have turned our news over to Chief Coy or Hemingway."

"Again, why?"

"Well, if we lose our man now, we'll soon feel that we ought to have turned the whole thing over to the police while the trail was fresh."

"Dave, don't you know, well enough, that newspapers do more than the police, nowadays, in clearing up mysteries?"

"This may be more than a mystery," hinted Dave. "Even if we get through to the end of this trail—or mystery—we may find a crime at that end."

"All the more need, then, for moving on fast. See here, Dave, I'll follow just the way this footprint points. You get out a hundred feet or so to the right. And we'll move as fast as we can, now."

The wisdom of this plan was soon apparent, for it was Dave Darrin who discovered the next footprint. He summoned Dick Prescott with a sharp hiss.

"Yes; all right," nodded Dick, joining his comrade and gazing down at one of the narrow bootmarks. "But don't send a long signal again, Dave. We might be close, and warn some one out of our way."

"What shall we do, then?"

"We'll look frequently at each other, and the fellow who discovers anything will make signs to the other."

Three minutes later Dick Prescott crouched low behind a line of bushes, his eyes glistening as he peered and listened. Then he began to make wildly energetic signals to Dave Darrin.

The head partner of Dick & Co. had fallen upon something that interested him—tremendously!

CHAPTER IV

THE "SOREHEADS" IN CONCLAVE

DAVE DARRIN came stealing over, as soft-footed as any panther.

Dick did not turn around to look at his chum. He merely held up a cautioning hand, and Darrin moved even more stealthily.

In another moment Dave's head was close to his chum's, and both young men were gazing upon the same scene.

"Davis and Fremont——" whispered Darrin in his chum's ear.

"Bayliss, Porter and Drayne," Dick nodded back, softly.

"Trenholm, Grayson, Hudson," continued Darrin.

"All the 'soreheads,' " finished Dick Prescott for him.

"Or nearly all," supplemented Dave.

Indeed, the scene upon which these two High School boys gazed was one that greatly interested them.

On a little knoll, just beyond the line of bushes, and on lower ground, fully a dozen young men lounged, basking in the morning sun, which poured through upon this small, treeless space.

Though the young men down in the knoll were not carefully attired, there was a general similarity in their dress. All wore sweaters, and nearly all of them wore cross-country shoes. Evidently the whole party had been out for a cross country run.

Now, the dozen or so were eagerly engaged in conversation.

"It's too bad Purcell won't join us," remarked Davis.

"Yes," nodded another fellow in the group; "he belongs with us."

"Oh, well," spoke up Bayliss, "if Purcell would rather be with the muckers, let him."

"Now, let's not be too rank, fellows," objected Hudson slowly. "I wouldn't call all the fellows muckers who don't happen to belong in our crowd."

"What would you call 'em, then?" growled Bayliss angrily. "Time was when only the fellows of the better families expected to go to High School, on their way to college. Now, every day-laborer's son seems to think he ought to go to High School——"

"And be received with open arms, on a footing of equality," sneered Porter.

"It's becoming disgusting," muttered Bayliss. "Not only do these cheap fellows expect to go to the High School, but they actually want to run the school affairs."

"I suppose that's natural, to some extent," speculated Porter.

"Why?" demanded Bayliss, turning upon the last speaker in amazement.

"Why, the sons of the poorer families are in a majority, nowadays," returned Hudson.

"Say, you're getting almost as bad as Purcell," warned Porter.

"If I am, I apologize, of course," responded Hudson.

"I've no real objection to the sons of poorer

men coming to the High School," vouchsafed Paulson, meditatively. "But you know the cream, the finer class of the High School student body, has always centered in the school's athletic teams. And now——"

"Yes; and now——" broke in Bayliss harshly.

"Why, these fellows, who are not much more than tolerated in the High School, or ought not to be, make the most noise at the meets of the training squads," continued Paulson.

"And some of 'em," growled Fremont, "actually have the cheek to carry off honors in scholarship, too. Take Dick Prescott, for instance."

"Oh, let the muckers have the scholarship honors, if that's all they want," retorted Bayliss. "A gentleman hasn't much need of scholarship, anyway, if he's an all-around, proper fellow in every other respect. But the gang that call themselves Dick & Co. are a fair sample of the muckers that we have to contend with."

"No," objected Fremont; "they're the very worst of the lot in the High School. Why, look at the advertising those fellows get for themselves. And not one of them of good family."

"Fellows of good, prominent families don't have to advertise themselves," observed Bayliss sagely.

It was plain that, by "good" family was meant one of wealth. These young men had little else in the way of a standard.

"It makes me cranky," observed Whitney, "to see the way a lot of the girls seem to notice just such fellows as Prescott, Darrin, Reade, Dalzell—fellows who, by rights, ought to be through with their schooling and earning wages as respectful grocery clerks or decent shoe salesmen."

"But this talk isn't carrying us anywhere," objected Bayliss. "The question is, what are we going to do with the football problem this year? We don't want to play in the same eleven with the cheap muckers, and have 'em think they're the whole eleven. The call for the football training squad is due to go up some time next week."

"Bert Dodge says——" interrupted Paulson.

"Yes; Dodge is the fellow I wish we had here with us to-day," interposed Bayliss. "Dodge is the one we ought to listen to."

"Poor Dodge has his own troubles to-day," murmured Hudson.

"Yes; I know—poor fellow," nodded Bayliss. "I wish we fellows could help him, but we can't."

"I was talking with Dodge yesterday, before his own troubles broke loose," went on Hudson.

"Dodge's idea is that we ought all to keep away when the football squad is called. Then Coach Morton may get an idea of how things are going, and he may see just what he ought to do."

"But suppose the muckers all answer the call in force?" inquired Trenholm. "What are we to do, then?"

"We're to keep out of the squad this year," responded Bayliss promptly. "See here, either we fellows organize the Gridley High School eleven ourselves, and decide who shall play in it, or else we stay out and let the muckers go ahead and pile up a record of lost games this year."

"That's hard on good old Gridley High School," murmured Hudson.

"True," agreed Fremont. "But it'll teach the town, the school authorities, the coach and everyone else a lesson. It'll be understood, after this year, that only the prominent fellows in the school should have any voice in athletics. Let the muckers be content with standing behind the side lines and rooting for the real High School crowd."

"Shall we put it to a vote?" asked Bayliss, looking about him.

"Yes!" answered several promptly.

"Then, as I understand it," continued Bayliss, "when the football call goes up, we're all

to ignore it. We're to continue to ignore the call, and keep out of the school football squad this year, unless the coach and the Athletics Committee agree that we shall have the naming of the candidates. Is that the general agreement among ourselves?"

"Yes!" came the chorus.

"Any contrary votes?"

Momentary silence reigned in this conclave of "soreheads."

"Yet," continued Bayliss, "we've started training among ourselves. This morning's cross-country is part of our daily training. If we have to refuse the football call, and stay out of the squad, are we to drop our present training?"

"Hardly, I should say," responded Fremont. "I have something to suggest in that line. If we can't go into what is really a gentleman's eleven, under the High School colors, I propose that we organize an eleven of our own, and call ourselves simply the Gridley Football Club. We can bring out an eleven that would put things all over any school team that the muckers could organize without our help."

"We wouldn't play the muckers, would we?" demanded Trenholm.

"Certainly not!" retorted Bayliss, with contemptuous emphasis.

"We won't even know that a mucker High School team is on earth," laughed Porter.

"I think we understand the plan well enough, now, don't we?" inquired Blaisdell, rising.

"We do," nodded Porter. "And we'll all do our full share toward bringing control of High School affairs back to the aristocratic leadership that it once had."

"Hoist our banners, and let them proclaim: 'Down with the muckers!' " laughed Hudson, rolling up the hem of his sweater.

"We want a good, not too fast but steady jog back to town," announced Bayliss.

At the first sign that the "soreheads" were preparing to leave the spot Dick had taken advantage of their noise to slip away. Dave had followed him successfully.

Then, from another hiding place these two prowling juniors, grinning, watched the "soreheads" move away at a loping run.

"We certainly know all we need to about that crowd," muttered Dick, a half-vengeful look in his eyes. "The snobs!"

"Oh, they're cads, all right," assented Dave. "Yet that bunch of fellows contains some of the material that is needed in putting forth the best High School team this year!"

"Humph!" commented Dave disgustedly. "Yet, Dick, I was almost surprised that you

would stop and listen, without letting the fellows know you were there."

"It does seem sneaky, at first thought," Prescott admitted, almost shamefacedly.

"Hold on there!" ordered Dave. "I don't believe you'd do a thing like that, Dick Prescott, unless you had an honorable reason for it."

"I did it because the honor of the High School is so precious to me—to us all," Dick replied. "We want to put forth a winning team, as Gridley High School has always done. Now, these 'soreheads' aim to defeat that by keeping a few of the best players off the eleven. I listened, Dave, because I wanted to know what the trouble was, and just who was making it. Now, I guess I know how to deal with the 'soreheads.' I'll make them ashamed of themselves."

"How?"

"One thing at a time, Dave. In our excitement we've almost forgotten that we started out to find Theodore Dodge and clear up the mystery of his disappearance."

CHAPTER V

AT THE END OF THE TRAIL

"THE further we go the more mysterious this becomes," mused Dick, as he and Darrin stood together over a clump of faintly-marked footprints, a quarter of an hour later.

"How does the mystery increase?" Darrin inquired.

"For one thing, we don't always find the bootmarks of the men who were with Mr. Dodge. Yet once in a while we do. There are the prints of all three. When Theodore Dodge passed by this way the other two men were with him, or had him in sight. And our course shows that the three were plunging deeper and deeper into the woods. But come along. There must be an end to this, somewhere."

Ten minutes later Prescott and Darrin felt that they had come to the end of the mystery. For the faint trail had led them up a slight, stony slope, and now the two boys lay flat on the ground.

Below them, in a bush-clad hollow, two miles from the world in general, stood a little, old, ramshackle shanty. The location was one that

seekers would hardly have found without a trail to lead them to it.

To the door of this shanty a broad-shouldered, rough-looking and powerful fellow of forty had just come. The man, who was poorly clad, wore brogans, and held in his right hand a weighty, ugly-looking club. The fellow was smoking a short-stemmed pipe, and now stood, with his left hand shading his eyes, peering off at the surrounding landscape.

Dick and Dave hugged the ground more closely behind their screen of bushes.

"It's all right, Bill," announced the lookout in the doorway.

" 'Course t'is," growled a voice from the inside. "Too far from the main line o' travel for anyone to be spying around. Besides, no one guesses——"

"Well, you can go to sleep if ye wanter, Bill. I'm goin' ter sit up and smoke."

With that the brogan-shod man disappeared inside the shanty. Dick and Dave glanced at each other with eager interest.

"I wonder whether they have Mr. Dodge in there with them?" breathed Dick, in his chum's ear.

"If Mr. Dodge is in there he's keeping amazingly quiet," Darrin responded doubtingly.

"Within a very few minutes," Prescott re-

joined, "I'm going to know whether Mr. Dodge is in that shanty."

"We found his footprint close enough near here," argued Dave.

"Yes, and I feel sure enough that Mr. Dodge is there. But why don't we hear something from him? The whole business is so uncanny that it gives one that creepy feeling."

For a full quarter of an hour the two chums remained hidden, barely stirring. From the shanty, at first, came crooning tones, as though the man in brogans were humming over old songs to himself. Occasionally there was a snore; evidently Bill was drowsing the day away.

"Now, I'm going down there," whispered Dick.

"Look out the big fellow doesn't catch you," warned Darrin. "I've an idea he'd beat you to a pulp if he caught you."

"I'm not as big as he is," admitted Dick, grinning, "but I think I might prove as fast as he on my feet."

As Prescott started to steal down into the hollow Dave reached about him, gathering all the fair-sized stones within reach.

"If Dick has to come from there on the run," soliloquized Darrin, "a few stones hurled at the face of that ugly-looking customer might

hold him back for a while. And I used to be called a pretty fair pitcher!"

Prescott, in the meantime, was stealing around the shanty, applying his eyes to some tiny cracks.

At last he turned, making straight and cautiously up the slope.

As he came near, Dick sent Dave a signal that made that latter youth throb with expectancy.

"Yes! We've found Theodore Dodge!" whispered young Prescott eagerly. "He's in there, lying on the floor, bound and gagged."

"Whew! And what is Mr. Brogans doing?"

"Sitting on the floor, smoking and playing solitaire with a dirty pack of cards. The other rascal, Bill, is sleeping at a great rate."

"What are we going to do now?"

"Dave, are you willing to stay here, hiding and keeping watch on the place?"

"Surely," nodded Darrin, with great promptness.

"If the wretches should try to take Mr. Dodge away from here——"

"I'll follow 'em, of course."

"And leave a paper trail," nodded Dick. "Here is all the paper I have in my pockets," he added.

"I have some, too," muttered Dave.

"I'll be back as speedily as I can get help."

"You ought not to be gone more than an hour."

"Not as long as that, I hope. Good-bye, Dave, and look out for yourself."

After going the first hundred yards Dick Prescott let himself out into a loping run, very much like that used by the "soreheads" in getting back to town. With a trained runner the cross-country style of running is suited for getting over long distances at fair speed.

Twenty minutes later young Prescott reached a farm house in which there was a telephone. He asked permission to use the instrument.

"Go right in the parlor, and help yourself," replied the farmer's wife.

As Dick rang on, and stood waiting, transmitter at his ear, he first thought of calling for the police station.

"No, I won't, either," he muttered. "This belongs to my paper. Let them tip off the police. Hello! Give me 'The Blade' office, Gridley, please."

Dick waited patiently a few moments. Then:

"Hullo! 'The Blade?' This is Prescott. Is Mr. Pollock there? He is? Good! Tell him I want to speak with him."

Then Mr. Pollock's voice sounded over the wire.

"Hullo, Prescott! Why aren't you on hand, with that big Dodge story hanging over our heads? Why, it brought me down hours before my time."

"Mr. Pollock, I've found Dodge," replied Dick composedly. "At least, Darrin and I——"

"What's that!" broke in the editor's excited voice. "You've found Dodge? Alive?"

As rapidly as he could young Presecott told the story. Mr. Pollock listened gladly.

"Now, where are you, Prescott?"

Dick told Mr. Pollock the name of the farmer from whose home he was telephoning.

"Just you wait there, Prescott. And, oh!—pshaw! I came near forgetting to tell you the biggest news of all—for you. Mrs. Dodge this morning offered a thousand dollars' reward for the finding of her husband, dead or alive. You'll get that reward—you and Darrin! But I've no more time to talk. Stay right where you are until I reach you."

Nor was it long before Dick, pacing by the farmyard gate, saw an automobile approaching at a lively clip. In it were the chauffeur and Editor Pollock.

The latter waved his hand wildly when he caught sight of his High School reporter.

Right behind this automobile sped another,

in which sat Chief Coy, Officer Hemingway and a uniformed policeman, in addition to the chauffeur.

"We didn't lose much time, did we?" hailed Mr. Pollock, as the first auto slowed up. "Jump in, quick! Show us the way."

"I suppose there's some excitement down in Gridley, about this time?" laughed Dick, as the two autos raced along once more.

"Not a bit," replied the editor. "And for the very simple reason that no one knows that Dodge has been found."

"His family know it, of course?" queried Dick.

"No; not a word. Chief Coy kept it quiet, and asked me to do the same. He didn't want the Dodge family all stirred up by false hopes in case you had made a mistake. The silence will keep 'The Evening Mail' from learning the news for a while. And I've had our forms left standing. We're all ready to run out an extra —in case you haven't made a mistake, Prescott," added Mr. Pollock quizzically.

Dick smiled resignedly at this implied doubt. But the autos were making fast time, and soon the machines had gone as far on the way as they could be used.

"Now we'll have to get out and strike across country, through the woods," Prescott called.

So far Dick had resolutely tried to keep out of his mind any thought of that thousand-dollar reward. It sounded too much like "blood money" to take pay for helping any afflicted family out of its troubles. Besides, it had been the glory of doing a piece of bright newspaper work that had allured the two High School boys at the outset.

"Yet a thousand dollars is—a thousand dollars!" Dick couldn't help feeling, wistfully, as he piloted his party across fields and through the woods. "A thousand dollars! Five hundred apiece for Dave and me! What a fearful big lot of money! What we could do with it, if we had it! I wonder whether it would be right and decent to take it?"

Then, as he neared the place where he had left his chum on post Dick Prescott found other and anxious thoughts crowding into his mind.

Was Dave Darrin, staunch and reliable Dave —still there, on post, and unharmed?

Was Theodore Dodge there? Were his captors still with him?

CHAPTER VI

THE SMALL SOUL OF A GENTLEMAN

A FEW minutes later all fears and doubts were dispelled.

Dave Darrin rose to greet the newcomers, informing them, in a whisper, that all was still well in the old shanty below.

He of the brogans and club heard a slight noise outside. Swiftly he rose and darted to the door, ready to pounce.

But he beheld the policemen, with the newspaper trio just behind them. More, Chief Coy and his subordinates had their revolvers drawn.

"Howdy, gents?" was Mr. Brogans' greeting, as he dropped his club and tried to grin.

"Take care of him, Hemingway," directed Chief Coy, briefly.

"Me?" demanded Brogans, in feigned astonishment. "What have *I* done?"

The noise roused Bill, who sprang up. But Bill must have found the police wonderfully soothing, for he quieted down at once.

Both rascals were taken care of. Then Theodore Dodge was found lying bound and gagged on the floor. A ragged, foul-smelling coat had been substituted for the one that had been left

at the river's bank. The banker looked up at the intruders with a stupefied leer, betraying neither alarm nor pleasure.

As soon as the two rough-looking fellows had been handcuffed Mr. Dodge was freed, and his tongue also, but Chief Coy, after raising the banker and questioning him, muttered:

"Clean out of his head. Daffy. Must have wandered away from Gridley during a loony streak. He isn't over it yet."

The two rough-looking ones protested loudly against being deprived of their liberty.

"I don't really know that you fellows have done anything," admitted Chief Coy. "But I'm taking you along on suspicion that it was you, and not Mr. Dodge himself, who bound and gagged him."

This retort, given with a great deal of dry sarcasm, silenced the prisoners for the time being.

"We ought to have this out an hour before 'The Evening Mail' people," exulted Editor Pollock. "Prescott, my boy, you're a born reporter! And, Darrin, you're not much behind. 'Theodore Dodge found by two "Blade" reporters!' That won't sound bad!"

The briefest questioning was enough to show that Theodore Dodge was in no condition to give any account of himself. He did not reply

with an intelligible word. His eyes held only a vacant stare. It was as though memory and reason had suddenly snapped within his brain.

"The doctors will want him," commented Chief Coy. "And we can't be hustling back a bit too soon."

It had been a gloomy morning at the home of Banker Dodge.

Through the night, none had slept. Anxiety had kept them all on the rack.

Mrs. Dodge, a thin and nervous woman, had gone from one spell of hysterics into another, as morning neared. A trained nurse had to be sent for.

Then in a calm lull Mrs. Dodge had telephoned for Lawyer Ripley, who lost his breakfast through the speed with which he obeyed the summons of the distracted wife.

As a result of the lawyer's visit the reward of a thousand dollars had been offered.

The house was quiet again. Dr. Bentley, having been called for the third time, had administered an opiate, and Mrs. Dodge was sleeping. The other members of the family tip-toed restlessly about.

Bert Dodge felt in a peculiarly "mean" frame of mind that morning. The young man simply could not remain in one spot. The more he had thought, through and through the night,

the more he had become convinced that his father had killed himself because of some entanglement in the bank's affairs.

"And I'll be pointed out as the defaulter's son," thought Bert bitterly. "Oh, why couldn't the guv'nor think of some one besides himself! We'll have to move away from Gridley, of course. But the disgrace will follow us anywhere we may go. Oh, it's awful—awful! Of course, I'm not in any way to blame. But, oh! What a disgrace!"

It was well along in the forenoon when Bayliss, returning homeward in sweater and running togs, espied Bert's white, wan face near the front door. Bayliss signaled cordially to young Dodge, who, glad of this kindliness at such a time, went down the walk to the gate.

"No news of your father yet, I suppose?" asked Bayliss.

"No," sighed Bert.

"Too bad, old fellow!"

"Yes; the uncertainty is pretty tough on us all," Dodge replied.

"Oh, you'll hear before the day is out, and the news will be all right, too," declared Bayliss, with well-meant cheeriness. "Then you'll be with us on the morning cross-countries again. We missed you a whole lot this morning, Bert."

"Did you?" asked young Dodge, brightening.

"Yes; and, by the way, we've decided on our course—for our set, you know. We're going to ignore the football call next week. If Coach Morton asks us any questions, then we'll let him know how the land lies. We won't try to make the High School team if the muckers are allowed the same show. We'll have a select crowd on the eleven, this year, or else all of our set will stay off."

"The muckers have some good football men among them, too," grumbled Bert. " Of course, for that gang that call themselves Dick & Co., we can't any more than make guesses. But some of them would be handy on an eleven, I guess."

"Yes; if they were not muckers," agreed Bayliss loftily. "But there are enough of our own kind to make as good an eleven as Gridley High School ever had."

"It's a pity we can't get up our own eleven, play the muckers, just once, and beat them out for the right to represent Gridley."

"It wouldn't be so bad an idea. But they might beat us," retorted Bayliss dryly. "So, on the whole, our fellows have decided not to pay any heed whatever to Dick & Co. or any of the other muckers. After this the line must be drawn, at High School, between the gentlemen and the other kind."

"All plans looking in that direction will have my hearty support," pledged Bert Dodge.

"I know it, old fellow."

"It's queer that the question never came up before about the muckers," Bert mused.

"We never had Dick & Co. in school athletics, until last year," replied Bayliss significantly.

"That fellow, Prescott, is about the worst——"

Bert Dodge stopped right there. Bayliss, too, started and turned. Around the nearest corner some folks were making a big noise. Then around the corner came two autos, while a crowd raced along on the sidewalks.

"Hurrah! Mr. Dodge is found. Dick Prescott and Dave Darrin found him!" shouted a score of urchins in the crowd.

Bert and Bayliss both gasped. Then the autos slowed up at the curb before the gate. The police prisoners were still in the second car.

Bert took a look, recognized his father, despite the strange look in that parent's face.

"Help them bring my father in, Bayliss!" called young Dodge. "I'll run to prepare the folks."

In another moment there was a turmoil of excitement inside the Dodge house. While the

excitement was still going on Bert came out to inform the crowd that both his father and mother needed quiet and medical attendance. Bert begged the crowd to go away quietly.

Dick and Dave were standing before the gateway while Editor Pollock answered some of the queries of the crowd.

"Great luck for you fellows, Prescott and Darrin!" called some one in the crowd. "You two will know what to do with a thousand dollars' reward!"

Bert Dodge wheeled about like a flash, and facing Dave and Dick, shouted:

"If that's what you two fellows are hanging around here for, you'd better clear out! Take it from me that you fellows will get no thousand dollars, or ten cents, out of our family!"

CHAPTER VII

THE FOOTBALL NOTICE GOES UP

MR. POLLOCK, usually a very calm man, wheeled upon young Dodge.

"My lad, when you find out what Prescott and Darrin have done in the way of rescuing your father, you'll feel wholly ashamed of yourself. I don't believe either young man has given a second thought to the reward."

People in a crowd take sides quickly. Bert heard several muttered remarks from the bystanders that made him flush. Then, choking and angry, he turned and darted for the house.

By this time Mr. Pollock, Dick and Dave were speeding for "The Blade" office.

Already a run had started on the Second National Bank. A crowd filled the counting room and extended out onto the sidewalk. Their depositors, largely small business men and people who ran private check accounts, were frightfully nervous about their money.

Up to noon the bank paid all demands, though the accounts were adjusted slowly, while the crowd grew in numbers outside. At noon the Second National availed itself of its privilege of closing its doors promptly at that hour on Saturday.

Dick Prescott wrote with furious speed at "The Blade" office. In another room Mr. Poullock wrote from the facts supplied by Dave Darrin. In half an hour from the time these three entered the office the "Extra" was out on the street—fifteen minutes ahead of "The Mail," which latter newspaper contained very little beyond the fact that Mr. Dodge had been found, and that he was now under the care of his family. "The Mail" stated that the discovery had been made by "two High School

boys'' aiding the police, and did not name either Dick or Dave.

On Monday the bank examiner arrived. He made a quick inspection of the bank's affairs, and pronounced the institution ''sound.'' The run on the bank stopped, and timid depositors began to bring back their money. The members of the Dodge family could once more hold up their heads.

In the meantime Dr. Bentley had called in a specialist. Together the two medical men decided that Theodore Dodge had suffered only from an extreme amount of overwork; that the strain had momentarily unbalanced his mind, and had made the deranged man contemplate drowning himself.

By means of a modified form of the ''third degree'' Chief Coy, by this time, had succeeded in making the two vagrants confess that they had found Mr. Dodge, with his coat and hat off standing by the bank of the stream. Guessing the banker's condition, and learning his identity, the two men, though they did not confess on this point, had evidently coaxed the banker away to their shanty away off in the heart of the woods. Undoubtedly it had been their plan to keep the banker under their own eyes, with a view of extorting a reward from the missing man's family. The judge of the

local court finally decided to send both men away for six months on a charge of vagrancy.

And here the matter seemed to end. Though Lawyer Ripley urged the prompt payment of the offered reward to Prescott and Darrin, Mrs. Dodge, influenced by her son, demurred. At Mr. Pollock's suggestion Dick and Dave promptly drew up and signed a paper releasing the Dodge family from any claim. This paper was also signed by the fathers of the two boys, and forwarded to Lawyer Ripley. That gentleman returned the paper to Dick, with a statement that he might have something to communicate at a later date.

Tuesday morning, with many secret misgivings, Coach Morton, who was also one of the submasters of the High School, posted the call for the football squad. The call was for three o'clock Thursday afternoon, at the gym.

"Humph!" was the audible and only comment of Bayliss, as he stood before the school bulletin board at recess and read the announcement.

"I guess the day for football here has gone by," observed Porter sneeringly.

"Of interest to ragamuffins only," sneered Paulson, as he turned away to join Fremont of the senior class.

"Listen to the wild enthusiasm over uphold-

ing the school's honor in athletics," muttered Dave, scowling darkly.

"We knew it was coming," declared Tom Reade.

Abner Cantwell was still principal at Gridley High School, though that violent-tempered and unpopular pedagogue had been engaged, this year, only as "substitute" principal. There were rumors that Dr. Thornton, the former and much-loved principal, would soon be in sufficiently good health to return. So the Board of Education had left the way clear for dropping Mr. Cantwell at any moment that it might see fit.

Dick & Co. had gathered by themselves on this Tuesday, at recess. They did not discuss the football call, nor its reception by the "soreheads," for they had known what was coming. Just before recess was over, however, there were sudden sounds of a riot around the bulletin board.

"Tear that down!"

"Throw 'em out!"

"Raus mit!"

"The mean cheats!"

There was a surging rush of High School boys for the bulletin board.

Bayliss and Fremont, both of the senior class, who had just posted a new notice, were now try-

The Scrimmage at Recess.

ing to push their way through an angry crowd of youngsters that had collected.

"They're no good!"

"A disgrace to the school!"

"Send 'em to Coventry!"

"No! Handle 'em right now!"

There was another rush.

"Get back, you hoodlums!" yelled Bayliss, his face violet with rage.

"I'll crack the head of any fellow that lays hands on me!" stormed Fremont.

"Oh, will he? Come on, then, fellows!"

Fremont was caught up as though by a cyclone. Two or three fellows seized him at a time, passing him down the corridor. The last to receive the hapless Fremont propelled him through the main doorway of the school building. Nor was this done with any gentle force, either.

Bayliss, not attempting to fight, was simply hustled along on his feet.

Out of one of the rooms near by rushed Mr. Cantwell, the principal—or "Prin." as he was known, his face white with the anger that he felt over what he regarded as a most unseemly disturbance.

"Stop this riot, young gentlemen!" commanded the principal sternly.

"Send in the riot call, like you did last year!"

piped up a disguised, thin, falsetto voice from the outskirts of the rapidly growing crowd. Quite a lot of the girls had gathered, too, by this time.

The principal turned around, sharply, as some of the girls began to giggle. But Mr. Cantwell was unable to detect the one who had thus taunted him.

Coach Morton peered over the railing of the floor above.

"Mr. Morton!" called the principal.

"Yes, sir."

"Sound the assembling gong, if you please."

Clang! clang! clang!

The din of the gong cut their recess four minutes short, but not one of the excited High School boys regretted it. They had had a chance to express themselves, and now fell in, filing down to the locker rooms, then up the stairs once more to the assembly room. Bayliss and Fremont came in, joining the others. They were white-faced, but strove to carry their heads very high.

The sounding of the gong had stopped the circulating of the paper that had been so angrily torn down from the bulletin board. It was in Dick Prescott's hands now.

The notice had announced the formation of a "select" party for a straw ride for the young

men and young women of the junior and senior classes on Thursday afternoon, starting at two-thirty o'clock. Invitations would be issued by the committee, after requests for tickets had been passed upon by that committee. Bayliss, Fremont and Paulson signed the notice of the straw ride.

This was the means by which the "soreheads" chose to announce that they would ignore the football squad call for Thursday.

Wisely, for once, the principal did not choose to question the young men regarding the excitement attending the close of recess. Studies and recitations went on as usual.

But feeling ran high. The "soreheads" and their sympathizers were known, by this time, to all the other young men of the student body. During the rest of the day's session many a "sorehead" found himself being regarded with black or sneering looks.

Of course the self-elected "exclusive" set was not numerously represented in the High School. Most of the boys and girls did not come from well-to-do families. Some who did had refused to have anything to do with the "sorehead" crowd.

The instant that school was dismissed that Tuesday afternoon scores of the more boisterous boys rushed from the building, across the

yard, and double-lined the sidewalk leading from the gateway.

"Ugh! ugh! ugh!" they groaned, whenever any of the "soreheads" tried to walk this gauntlet in dignified silence.

"Let's keep out of that, fellows," advised Dick, to his chums, who grouped themselves about him. "Groans and catcalls won't smooth or soothe any hard-feelings."

"I don't blame any of the fellows for what they're doing to the snobs," blazed Dan Dalzell indignantly.

"I don't say that I do, either," Dick replied quietly. "But there may be better ways of teaching fellows that they should stand by their school at all times."

"I'd like to know a better way, then," flared Tom Reade.

"Let's have it, instanter, Dick, if you've got one," begged Greg Holmes.

"Yes; out with it, old chap," begged Harry Hazelton.

But Dick Prescott smiled provokingly.

"Perhaps, with the help of some of the rest of you," he replied, "I shall be able to find a way of cooling some hot heads. I hope so, anyway."

"Dick has his plan all fixed, now," Dan whispered, hopefully, to Tom.

"If he has," quoth Reade, under his breath, "I wish he'd tell us his scheme."

"Humph!" retorted Dan. "You know Dick Prescott, and you know that he never shoots until he has taken time to aim."

CHAPTER VIII

DICK FIRES BOTH BARRELS

"OH—great Scott!" gasped Tom Reade, as he paused at an item in "The Blade" the following morning.

That item had been written by Prescott. There could be no doubt about it in Reade's mind.

"What's the matter?" asked Tom's father.

"Oh, Dick has been paying his respects to a certain clique in the High School, I take it," Tom replied, with a grin. "I heard, yesterday, that he was going to shoot into that crowd. But —and here's a short editorial on the same subject, too. Wow! Dick has fired into the enemy with both barrels!"

A moment later Tom passed the paper over to his father. Dick's article read:

There is a possibility that Gridley High School will not be in the front ranks in football this year. Those who know state that a "sorehead" combination has been formed

by the young male representatives of some of our wealthier families. These young men, having elected themselves, so it is said, the salt of the earth, or the cream of a new Gridley aristocracy, are going to refuse to play in the football eleven this year.

Even young men who belong to "prominent" families may have some gifts in the way of football ability. Three or four out of the dozen or more "soreheads" are really needed if Gridley High School is to maintain its standing this year. The remainder of the "soreheads" may, with advantage to the High School eleven, be excused from offering themselvs.

The "soreheads," it is stated, feel that it would be beneath the dignity of their families for them to play on an eleven which must, in any event, be recruited largely from the sons of the Gridley families less fortunately situated financially.

Strangely enough, though they don't intend to play football this year, these "soreheads" have been training hard of late, one of their practices being the taking of an early morning cross-country run together.

The average young man at the High School is as eager as ever to uphold the town's and the school's honor and dignity on the football gridiron this year. Whether the so-called "soreheads" will reconsider their proposed course of action and throw themselves in with the common lot for the upholding of the Gridley name and the honor of the High School will have been determined within the next few days. It is possible, however, that this little coterie of self-appointed "exclusives" will continue to refuse to cast their lot with the commoner run of High School boys, to whom some of the "soreheads" have referred as "muckers." A Gridley "mucker," it may be stated in passing, is a Gridley boy of poor parents who desires to obtain a decent education and better himself in life.

"Is that article true?" demanded Tom Reade's father.

"Yes, sir," Tom responded. "Dick wouldn't have written it, if it hadn't been. But turn over to the editorial column, and see that other little bit."

The editorial in question referred to the news printed in another column, and stated that this information, if correct, showed a state of affairs at the High School that needed bettering. The editor continued:

> If there are in the High School any young snobs who display such a mean and un-American spirit, then the thoughtful reader must conclude that these young men are being unjustly educated at the public expense, for such boys are certain to grow into men who will turn nothing of value back into the community. Such young men, if they really need to study, should be educated at the expense of their families. Both the High School and the community can easily dispense with the presence of snobs and snobbery.

"I guess there'll be some real soreness in some heads this morning," laughed Tom's father.

"Won't there!" ejaculated Tom, and hurried out into the street. It did not take him long to find some of his chums and other High School boys. Those who had not seen "The Blade" read the two marked portions eagerly.

Bert Dodge had "The Blade" placed before him by his sister. Bert read with reddening cheeks.

"That's what comes of letting a fellow like Dick Prescott write for the papers," Bert stormed angrily. "That fellow ought to be tarred and feathered!"

"Why don't you suggest it to the 'soreheads'?" asked his sister, quizzically. Grace Dodge was an amiable, democratic, capable girl who had gone through college with honors, and yet had not gained a false impression of the importance conferred by a little wealth.

"Grace, I believe you're laughing at me!" flared the young man exasperatedly.

"No; I'm not laughing. I'm sorry," sighed the young woman. "But I can imagine that a good many are laughing, this morning, and that the number will grow. Bert, dear, do you think any young man can hope to be very highly esteemed when he sets his own importance above the good name and success of his school?"

Bert did not answer, but quit the house moodily. He encountered some of "his own set," but they were not a very cheerful-looking lot that morning. Not one of the "soreheads" could escape the conviction that Dick Prescott held the whip hand of public opinion over them. What none of them appreciated, was the moder-

ation with which young Prescott had wielded his weapon.

Dodge, Bayliss, Paulson and Hudson entered the High School grounds together, that morning, ten minutes before opening time. As the quartette passed, several of the little groups of fellow students ceased their talk and turned away from the four "soreheads." Then, after the quartette had passed, quiet little laughs were heard.

All four mounted the steps of the building with heightening color.

Before the door, talking together, stood Fred Ripley and Purcell, whom the "soreheads" had endeavored to enlist.

"Good morning, Purcell. Morning, Ripley," greeted Bayliss.

Fred and Purcell wheeled about, turning their backs without answering.

Once inside the building the four young fellows looked at each other uneasily.

"Are the fellows trying to send us to coventry?" demanded Dodge.

"Oh, well," muttered Bayliss, "there are enough of us. We can stand it!"

Yet, at recess, the "soreheads" found themselves extremely uncomfortable. None of their fellow-students, among the boys, would notice them. Whenever some of the "soreheads"

passed a knot of other boys, low-toned laughs followed. Even many of the girls, it proved, had taken up with the Coventry idea.

"Fellows, come to my place after you've had your luncheons," Bayliss whispered around among his cronies, after school was out for the day. "I—I guess there are a—a few things that we want to talk over among ourselves. So come over, and we'll use the carriage house for a meeting place. Maybe we'll organize a club among ourselves, or—or—do something that shall shut us out and away from the common herd of this school."

When the dozen or more met in the Bayliss carriage house that afternoon there were some defiant looks, and some anxious ones.

"I don't know how you fellows feel about this business," began Hudson frankly. "But I've had a pretty hot grilling at home by Dad. He asked me if I belonged to the 'sorehead' gang. I answered as evasively as I could. Then dad brought his fist down on the table and told me he prayed that I wouldn't go through life with any false notions about my personal dimensions. He told me, rather explosively, that I would never be a bit bigger, in anyone's estimation than I proved myself to be."

"Hot, was he?" asked Bayliss, with a half sneer.

"He started out that way," replied Hudson. "But pretty soon Dad became dignified, and asked me where I had ever gotten the notion that I amounted to any more than any other fellow of the same brain caliber."

"What did you tell him? asked Bert Dodge, frowning.

"I couldn't tell him much," retorted Hudson, smiling wearily. "Dad was primed to do most of the talking. When he stopped for breath mother began."

"It's all that confounded Dick Prescott's doings! It's a shame! It's a piece of anarchy—that's what it is!" muttered Paulson. "On my way here I passed three men on the street. They looked at me pretty hard, and laughed after I had gone by. Fellows, are we going to allow that mucker, Dick Prescott, to make us by-words in this town?"

"No siree, no!" roared Fremont.

"Good! That's what I like to hear," put in Hudson dryly. "And what are we going to do to stop Dick Prescott and turn public opinion our way?"

"Why——"

"We——"

"The way to——"

"We'll——"

Several spoke at once, then all came to a full

stop. The "soreheads" looked at each other in puzzled silence.

"What are we going to do?" demanded Fremont. "How are we going to hit back at a fellow who has a newspaper that he can use as a club on your head?"

"We might have a piece put in 'The Evening Mail,'" hinted Porter, after a dazed silence. "That's the rival paper."

"Yes!" chimed in Bayliss, eagerly. "We can write a piece and get it put in 'The Mail.' Our piece can say that there has been a tendency, this year, or was believed to be one, to get a rowdyish element of the High School into the High School eleven, and that our move was really a move intended to sustain the past reputation of the Gridley High School for gentlemanly playing in all school sports. That will hit Dick & Co., and a lot of others, and will turn the laugh back on the muckers."

This proposition brought forth several eager cries of approval.

"I see just one flaw in the plan," observed Hudson slowly.

"What is it?" demanded half a dozen at once.

"Why, 'The Evening Mail' is a paper designed to appeal to the more rowdyish element in Gridley politics. 'The Mail's' circulation is about all among the class of people who come

nearest to being 'rowdyish.' So I'm pretty certain, fellows, that 'The Mail' wouldn't take up our cause, and hammer our enemies with the word 'rowdy.' 'The Blade' is the paper that circulates among the best people in Gridley."

"And Dick Prescott writes for 'The Blade'!"

A gloomy silence followed, broken by Bayliss's disconsolate query:

"Then, hang it! What can we do?"

And that query stuck hard!

CHAPTER IX

BAYLISS GETS SOME ADVICE

ON that fateful Thursday morning every High School boy, and nearly every High School girl saw "The Blade."

The morning paper, however, contained no allusion whatever to the football remarks of the day before.

Instead, there was an article descriptive of the changes to be made out at the High School athletic field this present year, and there were points and "dope" (as the sporting parlance phrases it) concerning the records and rumored new players of other High School elevens that were anxious to meet Gridley on the gridiron this coming season.

Thursday's article was just the kind of a one that was calculated to make every football enthusiast eager to see the season open in full swing.

Again the "soreheads" came to school, and once more they had to pass the silent groups of their fellow students, who stood with heads turned away. The reign of Coventry seemed complete. Never before had any of the "soreheads" understood so thoroughly the meaning of loneliness.

At recess all the talk was of football. None of this talk, however, was heard by the "soreheads." Whenever any of these went near the other groups the talk ceased instantly. There was no comfort in the yard, that morning, for a "sorehead."

When school let out that afternoon, at one o'clock, Bayliss, Fremont, Dodge and their kind scurried off fast. No one offered to stop them. These "exclusive" young men could not get away from the fact that exclusion was freely accorded them.

Fred Ripley, as had been his wont in other years when he was a freshman, walked homeward with Clara Deane.

"Fred, you haven't got yourself mixed up at all with that 'sorehead' crowd, have you?" Miss Deane asked.

"Not much!" replied Fred, with emphasis. "I want to play football this year."

"Will all the 'soreheads' be kept out of the eleven, even if they come to their senses?" Clara inquired.

"Now, really, you'll have to ask me an easier one than that," replied Fred Ripley laughingly.

"I had an idea that all of the fellows whose families are rather comfortably well off might be in the movement—or the strike—or whatever you call it," Clara replied.

"Oh, no; there's a lot of us who haven't gone in with the kickers—and glad we are of it," Fred replied.

"Still, don't you believe in any importance attaching to the fact that one comes of one of the rather good old families?" asked Clara Deane thoughtfully.

"Why, of course, it's something to be quietly proud of," Fred slowly assented. Then added, with a quick laugh:

"But the events of the last two days show that one should keep his pride buttoned in behind his vest."

As for the "soreheads" themselves, there weren't any more meetings. As soon as they actually began to realize how much amused contempt many of the Girdley people felt for them,

these young men began to feel rather disgusted with themselves.

Across the street, and not far from the gymnasium building, was an apartment house in which two apartments were vacant. Being well acquainted with the agent, Bayliss borrowed the key to one of the apartments. Before half past two that afternoon, Bayliss and Dodge were in hiding, where they could look out through a movable shutter at the gymnasium building.

"There go Prescott, Darrin and Reade," Bayliss soon reported.

"Oh, of course; they'll answer the football call," sniffed Dodge. "It was over fellows just like them that the whole trouble started."

"And there's Dalzell, Hazelton and Hanshew. Griffith is just behind them."

"Yes; all muckers," nodded Dodge.

"There's Coach Morton."

"Of course; he has to attend," replied Dodge, coming toward the shuttered window. "But I'll wager old Morton isn't feeling overhappy this afternoon."

"I don't know," grumbled Bayliss. "There he is at the gym. door, shaking hands with Dick Prescott and Dave Darrin, and laughing pretty heartily."

"Laughing to keep his courage up, I reckon," clicked Bert Dodge dryly. "Morton knows

he's going to miss a lot of faces that he'd like to see there this year."

Then Dodge took up post at the peephole, while Bayliss stepped back, yawning.

Several more football aspirants neared and entered the gym. The name of each was called off by Bert.

"This is the first year," chuckled Bayliss, "when Gridley hasn't had a chance for a star eleven."

"I'll miss the game, myself, like fury," commented Dodge. "All through last season, when I played on the second eleven, I was looking forward to this year."

"Now, don't you go to getting that streak, and quit us," warned Bayliss quickly. "Our set is going to get up its own eleven; don't forget that! And we're going to play some famous games."

"Sure!" admitted Dodge. But there was a choke in his throat.

Just a few moments later Bert Dodge gave a violent start, then cried out, in a voice husky with emotion:

"Oh, I say, Bayliss, look——"

"What——"

"*Hudson!*"

"What about him?"

"Quick!"

"Well, you ninny?"

"Hudson is going in the——"

With a cry partly of doubting, partly of rage, Bayliss leaped forward, crowding out Dodge in order to get a better view.

Hudson was actually ascending the gym. steps, and going up as though he meant business.

"He's gone over to—to—them!" gasped Bert Dodge.

"The mean *traitor!*" hissed Bayliss.

Hudson did, indeed, brave it out by going straight on into the gym. As he entered some of the fellows already there glared at him dubiously. But Hudson met the look bravely.

"Hullo!" cried Dick. "There's Hudson!"

Coach Morton heard, from another part of the gym. Turning around, the coach greeted the reformed 'sorehead' with a nod and a smile. Then some of the fellows spoke to Hudson as that young man moved by them. In a few moments more, Hudson began to feel almost at home among his own High School comrades.

Then Drayne, another 'sorehead,' showed up. He, too, was treated as though nothing had happened. When Trenholm, still another of the "soreheads," looked in at the gym., he appeared very close to being afraid. When he saw Hudson and Drayne there he hastened for-

ward. By and by Grayson came in. At the window across the street Bayliss and Dodge had checked off all four of these "deserters" and "traitors."

"Well, they'll play, anyway—either on school or on second," muttered Bert, to himself. "Oh, dear! Just think the way things have turned out."

These four deserters from the "soreheads" were all out of that very select crowd who did respond to the football call.

Promptly at three o'clock Coach Morton called for order. Then, after a very few remarks, he called for the names of all who intended to enter the football training squad for this season.

"And let every fellow who thinks he's lazy, or who doesn't like to train hard and obey promptly, keep his name off the list," warned the coach dryly. "I've come to the conclusion that what we need in this squad is Army discipline. We're going to have it this year! Now, young gentlemen, come along with your names—those of you who really believe you can stand Spartan training."

"I think I might draw the line at having the fox—or was it a wolf—gnawing at my entrails, as one Spartan had to take it," laughed one youngster.

"Guess again, or you'd better stay off the squad this year," laughed the coach. "This is going to be a genuinely rough season for all weaklings."

There was a quick making up of the roll.

"To-morrow afternoon, at three sharp, you'll all report on the athletic field," announced Coach Morton, when he had finished writing down the names. "Any man who fails to show up to-morrow afternoon will have his name promptly expunged from the squad rolls. No excuses will be accepted for failure to-morrow."

There was a crispness about that which some of the fellows didn't like.

"Won't a doctor's certificate of illness go?" asked one fellow laughingly.

"It will go—not," retorted coach. "Pill-takers and fellows liable to chills aren't wanted on this year's team, anyway. Now, young gentlemen, I'm going to give you a brief talk on the general art of taking care of yourselves, and the art of keeping yourselves in condition."

The talk that followed seemed to Dick Prescott very much like a repetition of what Coach Luce had said to them the winter before, at the commencement of indoor training for baseball.

As he finished talking on health and condition Mr. Morton drew from one of his pockets a bunch of folded papers.

"I am now," he continued, "going to present to each one of you a set of rules, principles, guides—call them what you will. On this paper each one of you will find laid down rules that should be burned into the memories of all young men who aspire to play football. Do not lose your copies of these rules. Read the rules over again and again. Memorize them! Above all, put every rule into absolute practice."

Then, at a sign, the young men passed before the coach to receive their printed instructions.

"Something new you've gotten up, Mr. Morton?" inquired one of the fellows.

"No," the coach admitted promptly. "These rules aren't original with me. I ran across 'em, and I've had them printed, by authority from the Athletics Committee. I wish I had thought up a set of rules as good."

As fast as they received their copies each member of the squad darted away to read the rules through. This is what each man found on the printed sheet:

"1. Work hard and be alive.
2. Work hard and learn the rules.
3. Work hard and learn the signals.
4. Work hard and keep on the jump.
5. Work hard and have a nose for the ball.
6. Work hard all the time. Be on speaking terms with the ball every minute.

7. Work hard and control your temper and tongue.

8. Work hard and don't quit when you're tackled. Hang onto the ball.

9. Work hard and get your man before he gets started. Get him before the going gets good.

10. Work hard and keep your speed. If you're falling behind your condition is to blame.

11. Work hard and be on the job all the time, a little faster, a little sandier, a little more rugged than the day before.

12. Work hard and keep your eyes and ears open and your head up.

13. Work hard and pull along the man with the ball. This isn't a game of solitaire.

14. Work hard and be on time at practice every day. Train faithfully. Get your lessons. Aim to do your part and to make yourself a perfect part of the machine. Be a gentleman. If the combination is too much for you, turn in your togs and call around during the croquet season."

"What do you think of that, as expounding the law of football?" smiled coach, looking down over Dave Darrin's shoulder.

"It doesn't take long to read, Mr. Morton. And it ought not to take long to memorize these fourteen rules. But to live them, through and through, and up and down—that's going to take a lot of thought and attention."

To the four ex-"soreheads" not a word had been said about the late unpleasantness, nor was this quartette any longer in Coventry.

Trenholm, Grayson, Drayne and Hudson were

the four best football men of the Bayliss-Dodge faction. Now that they were to play with the High School eleven all concerned felt wholly relieved.

As the young men were leaving the gym. that afternoon Coach Morton found a chance to grip Dick's arm and to whisper lightly in his ear:

"Thank you, Prescott."

"For what, Mr. Morton."

"Why, for what you managed to do to hold the school eleven together. That was clever newspaper work, Prescott. And it has helped the school a lot. I'm no longer uneasy about Gridley High School on the gridiron for this season. We'll have a team now!"

With a confident nod the coach strolled away.

As the gym. doors were thrown open the members of the new football squad rushed out with joyous whoops. Some of the more mischievous or spirited actually tackled unsuspicious comrades, toppling their victims over to the ground. That line of tactics resulted in many a "chase" that brought out some remarkably good sprinting talent. Thus the squad dissipated itself like the mist, and soon the grounds near the school were deserted.

Bayliss and Bert Dodge went away to nurse a grievance that nothing seemed to cure.

For these two, now that their strong line of

resistance had been broken, found themselves secretly longing, as had the four deserters, for a place in the football squad.

Bert Dodge sulked along to school, alone that Friday morning. Bayliss, however, after a night of wakefulness, had decided to "eat crow."

So, as Dick, Dave and Greg Holmes were strolling along schoolward, Bayliss overhauled them.

"Good morning, fellows," he called, briskly, with an offhand attempt at geniality.

All three of the chums looked up at him, then glanced away again.

"Oh, I say, now, don't keep it up," coaxed Bayliss. "We High School fellows all want to be decent enough friends. And how's the football? I don't suppose the squad is full yet. I —I half believe I may join and take a little practice."

"Thinking of it?" asked Dick, looking up coolly.

"Yes—really," replied Bayliss.

"See the coach, then; he's running the squad."

"Yes; I guess I will, thanks. Good morning!"

Bayliss sauntered along, blithely whistling a tune. He knew Coach Morton would give him

the glad hand of welcome for the squad and the team.

"Oh, Mr. Morton," was Bayliss's greeting, as he encountered the coach near the school building steps.

"Yes?" asked the submaster pleasantly.

"I—I—er—I didn't make the meeting yesterday afternoon, but I guess you might put my name down for the squad."

"Isn't this a bit late, Bayliss?" asked the submaster, eyeing the youth keenly.

"Perhaps, a bit," assented the confident young man. "However——"

"At its meeting, last night, Mr. Bayliss, the Athletics Committee of the Alumni Association advised me to consider the squad list closed."

"Closed?" stammered Bayliss, turning several shades in succession. "Closed? Do—do you mean——"

"No more additions will be made to the squad this year," replied the coach quietly, then going inside.

Bayliss stood on the steps, a picture of humiliation and amazement.

"Fellows," gasped Bayliss, as Prescott and his two chums came along, "did you hear that? Football list closed?"

"Want some advice?" asked Dick, halting for an instant.

"Yes," begged Bayliss.

"Never kick a sore toe against a stone wall," quoth Dick Prescott, and passed on into the school building.

CHAPTER X

TWO GIRLS TURN THE LAUGH

BY this time training was going on briskly. Four days out of every week the squad had to practise for two hours at the athletic field.

There were tours of work in the gym., too. Besides, it was "early to bed and early to rise" for all members of the squad.

Even those who hoped only to "make second" were under strict orders to let nothing interfere with their condition.

Three mornings in the week Coach Morton met all squad men for either cross-country work or special work in sprinting. And this was before breakfast, when each man was on honor pledged to take only a pint of hot water—nothing more—before reporting. On the other mornings, football aspirants were pledged to run without the coach.

Yet, with all this, studies had to be kept up to a high average, for no man on the "unsat"

list could hope to be permitted to play football.

Hard work? Yes. But discipline, above all. And discipline is priceless to the young man who really hopes to get ahead in life!

"You're not playing fair," Dave cried reproachfully to his chum one day.

"Why not?" Prescott questioned mildly.

"You're using hair tonic!" Darrin asserted, with mock seriousness, as he gazed at Dick's bushy mop of football hair. "You're growing a regular chrysanthemum for a top piece to your head."

"Oh, my hair, eh?" smiled Dick. "Why, you can have as fine a lot of hair if you want to take the trouble."

"Don't I want it, though?" retorted Darrin. "What kind of tonic do you use?"

"Grease," smiled Prescott.

"Nothing but grease?"

"Nothing much."

"What kind of grease?"

"Elbow!"

"Now, stop your joshing," ordered Dave promptly. "No kind of muscular work is going to bring out a fuzzy rug like that on anyone's skypiece."

"But that's just how I do it," Dick insisted. "Not a bit hard, either. See here! Just use

your finger tips, briskly, like this, and stir your whole scalp up with a brisk massage."

"How long do you keep it up?" demanded Dave, after following suit for some time.

"Oh, about ninety seconds, I guess," nodded Prescott. "You want to do it eight times a day, and wash your head weekly, though with bland soap and not too much of it."

"Is that honestly all you do to get a Siberian fur wig such as you're wearing?"

"That's all I do," replied Dick. "Except—yes; there's one thing more. Go out of doors all you can without a hat."

"The active curry-comb and the vanished hat for mine, then," muttered Dave, with another envious look at Dick's bushy hair.

Nor did Dave rest until the other chums all had the secret. By the time that the football season opened Dick & Co. were the envy of the school for their heavy heads of hair.

With all the hard work of training, Coach Morton did not intend that the young men should be so busy as to have no time for recreation. He understood thoroughly the value of the lighter, happier moments in keeping an athlete's nervous system up to concert pitch.

Though the baseball training of the preceding spring had been "stiff" enough, Dick & Co.

soon found that the football training was altogether more rugged.

In fact, Coach Morton, with the aid of Dr. Bentley as medical director, weeded out a few of the young men after training had been going on for a fortnight. Some failed to show sufficient reserve "wind" after running. A few other defectives proved not to have hearts strong enough for the grilling work of the gridiron.

All the members of Dick & Co., however, managed to keep in the squad. In fact, hints soon began to go around, mysteriously, that Dick & Co. were having the benefit of some outside training. Purcell came to young Prescott and asked him frankly about this report.

"Nothing in it," Dick replied promptly. "We're having just the same training as the rest of the boys. But I'll tell you a secret."

"Go on!" begged Purcell eagerly.

"You know the training rules—early retiring and all?"

"Yes; of course."

"Well, we fellows are sticking to orders like leeches. Every night, to the minute, we're in bed. We make a long night's sleep of it. Then, besides, we don't slight a single particle of the training work that we're told to do by ourselves. We've agreed on that, and have promised each

other. Now, do you suppose all the fellows are sticking quite as closely to coach's orders?"

"I—I—well, perhaps they're not," agreed Purcell.

"Are you?" insisted Dick.

"In the main, I do."

"Oh," observed Prescott, with mild sarcasm. "'In the *main'!* Now, see here, Purcell, we High School fellows are fortunate in having one of the very best coaches that ever a High School squad did have. Mr. Morton knows what he's doing. He knows how to bring out condition, and how to teach the game. He lays down the rules that furnish the sole means of success at football. And you—one of our most valuable fellows—are following some of his instructions —when they don't conflict with your comfort or with your own ideas about training. Now, honestly, what do you know about training that is better than Coach Morton's information on that very important subject?"

"Oh, come, now; you're a little bit too hard, Prescott," argued Purcell. "I do about everything just as I'm told."

"You admit Mr. Morton's ability, don't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then why don't you stick to every single rule that's laid down by a man who knows what

he is doing? It will be better for your condition, won't it, Purcell?"

"Yes, without a doubt."

"And what is better for you is better for the team and for the school, isn't it?"

"By Jove, Prescott, you're a stickler for duty, aren't you?" cried Purcell.

He spoke in a louder tone this time. Two girls who were passing the street corner where the young men stood heard the query and glanced over with interest.

Neither young man perceived the girls at that moment.

"Why, yes," Prescott answered slowly. "Duty is the main thing there is about life, isn't it?"

"Right again," laughed Purcell.

One of the girls looked swiftly at the other. They were Laura Bentley and Belle Meade, friends of Dick's and Dave's, and also members of the junior class.

"Well, I'm going to take a leaf out of your book," pursued Purcell. "I'm really as anxious to see Gridley High School always on top as you or any other fellow can be."

"Of course you are," nodded Dick. "The way you put our baseball team through last season proves that."

"I'm going to be a martinet for training,

hereafter," Purcell declared earnestly. "I'm going to be a worse stickler than old coach himself. And I'm going to exercise my right as a senior to watch the other fellows and hold their noses to the training grindstone."

"Then I'm not worried about Gridley having a winning team this year," Dick answered.

"By Jove, you had a lot to do with that, too, didn't you, Prescott?" cried Purcell. "You put it over the 'soreheads' so hard that we never heard from them again after we got started."

"You helped there, also, Purcell. If you and Ripley and a few others had gone over to the 'soreheads' it would have stiffened their backbone and nothing could have made it possible, this year, for Gridley High School to have an eleven that would represent all the best football that there is in the grand old school."

In the first two years of their school life Dick and Dave had spent many pleasant hours in the society of Laura and Belle. So far, during the junior year, the chums had had but little chance to see the girls, for the demands of football were fearfully exacting.

Laura, being almost at the threshold of seventeen years, had grown tall and womanly. Bert Dodge began to notice what a very pretty girl the doctor's daughter was becoming. So, one afternoon while the football squad was prac-

tising hard over on the athletic field, Bert encountered Laura and Belle as they strolled down the Main Street.

Lifting his hat, Dodge greeted the girls, and stood chatting with them for a few moments. To this neither of the girls could object, for Bert's manners, with the other sex, were always irreproachable.

But, presently, Laura saw her chance. She did not want to be rude, but Bert's face had just taken on a half-sneering look at a chance mention of Dick's name.

"You aren't playing football this year, Bert?" Laura asked innocently.

Bert quickly flushed.

"No," he admitted.

"Of course everyone can't make the eleven," Belle added, with mild malice.

"I—I don't believe I'd care to," Dodge went on. "I—you see—I don't care about all the fellows in the squad."

"I don't suppose every boy who is playing on the squad is a chum of everyone else," remarked Laura.

"Such fellows as Prescott, for instance, I don't care much about," Bert continued, with a swift side glance at Laura Bentley to see how she took that remark. But Laura showed not a sign in her face.

"No?" she asked quietly. "I think him a splendid fellow. By the way, he and Dave Darrin haven't received the reward for finding your father, have they?"

Bert gasped. His face went white, then red. He fidgeted about for an answer.

"No," he replied, cuttingly, at last, "and I don't believe they ever will."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," cried Laura in quick contrition. "I didn't know that it was a tender spot with you, or your family."

"It isn't," Bert rejoined hurriedly. "It simply amounts to this, that the reward will never be paid to a pair of cheeky, brazen-faced——"

"Won't you please stop right there, Mr. Dodge?" Laura asked sweetly. "Mr. Prescott and Mr. Darrin are friends of ours. We don't like to hear remarks that cast disrespect in their direction."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," answered Bert, trying not to be stiff. But he was ill at ease, leaving the girls very soon after.

Yet, in his hatred for Dick and Dave, young Dodge resolved upon a daring stroke. He enlisted Bayliss, and the pair sought to "cut out" Prescott and Darrin with Laura and Belle.

Neither Dick nor Dave was in love. Both were too sensible for that. Both knew that love

affairs were for men old enough to know their own minds. Yet the friendship between the four young people had been a very proper and wholesome affair, and much pleasure had been derived on all sides.

Nowadays, however, Bert and Bayliss managed to be much out and around Gridley while the football squad was at practice. Almost daily this pair met Laura and Belle, as though by accident, and the two young seniors usually managed, without apparent intrusion, to walk along beside Laura and Belle, often seeing the pair to the home gate of one or the other.

"You two fellows want to look out," Purcell warned Dick and Dave, good-naturedly, one day. "Other fellows are after your sweethearts."

"I wonder how that happened," Dick observed good-humoredly. "I didn't know we had any sweethearts."

"What about——" began Purcell, wondering if he had made a mistake.

"Please don't drag any girls' names into bantering talk," interposed Dave, quickly though very quietly.

So Purcell said no more, and he had, indeed, meant no harm whatever. But others were noticing, and also talking. High School young people began to take a very lively interest in

the new appearance of Dodge and Bayliss as escorts of Laura and Belle.

Then there came one especially golden day of early autumn, when it seemed as though the warm, glorious day had driven everyone out onto the streets. Dodge and Bayliss met Laura and Belle, quite as though by accident, and manifested a rather evident determination to remain in the company of the girls as long as possible.

Finally Laura halted before one of the department stores.

"Belle, there's an errand you and I had in mind to do in there, isn't there?" Laura asked.

"May we have the very great pleasure, then, of your leave to wait until you are through with your shopping?" spoke up Bert Dodge quickly.

Laura flushed slightly. Just then more than a dozen of the football squad, coming back from the field, marching solidly by twos, turned the corner and came upon this quartette. There were many curious looks in the corners of the eyes of members of the squad.

Despite themselves Dick and Dave could feel themselves reddening.

But Laura Bentley was equal to the emergency.

"Here come the school's heroes—the fellows

who keep Gridley's High School banner flying in the breeze," she laughed pleasantly.

Both Dodge and Bayliss started to answer, then closed their lips.

"Won't you please excuse us, boys?" begged Laura, in her usual pleasant voice. "Here are Dick and Dave, and Belle and I wish to speak with them."

From some of the members of the football squad went up a promptly stifled gasp that sounded like a very distant rumble.

Dick and Dave, looking wholly rough and ready in their sweaters, padded trousers and heavy field shoes, stepped out of the marching formation as though obeying an order.

The chums looked almost uncouth, compared with the immaculate, dandyish pair, Dodge and Bayliss. The latter, with so many amused glances turned their way, could only flush deeply, stammer, raise their hats and—fade away!

The lesson was a needed and a remembered one. Laura and Belle took their afternoon walks in peace thereafter.

CHAPTER XI

DOES FOOTBALL TEACH REAL NERVE?

"GET in there, Ripley! Don't be afraid. It's only a leather dummy. It can't hurt you! Now, tackle the dummy around the hips—*hoist!*"

A laugh went up among the crowd as Fred, crouching low, head down, sailed in at that tackling dummy.

Young Ripley's face was red, but he took the coach's stern tone in good part, for the young man was determined to make good on the eleven this year.

"Now, Prescott! Show us that you can beat your last performance! Imagine the dummy to be a two hundred and twenty pound center!"

Dick rushed in valiantly, catching the dummy just right.

"Let go!" called the coach, laughingly. "It isn't a sack of gold!"

Another laugh went up. This was one of the semi-public afternoons, when any known well-wisher of Gridley was allowed on the athletic field to watch the squad at work.

For half an hour the young men had been working hard, mostly at the swinging dummy,

for Coach Morton wanted much improvement yet in tackling.

"Now," continued the coach, in a voice that didn't sound very loud, yet which had the quality of carrying to every part of the big field, "it'll be just as well if you fellows don't get the idea that only swinging leather dummies are to be tackled. The provisional first and second teams will now line up. Second has the ball on its own twenty-yard line, and is trying to save its goal. You fellows on second hustle with all your might to get the ball through the ranks of the first, or School eleven. Fight for all you're worth to get that ball on the go and keep it going! You fellows of the first, or School eleven, I want to see what you can do with real tackling."

There was a hasty adjusting of nose-guards by those who wore that protection. The ball was placed, the quarter-back of the second eleven bending low to catch it, at the same time comprehending the signal that sounded briskly.

The whistle blew; the ball was snapped, and quarter-back darted to the right, passing the ball. Second's right tackle had been chosen to receive and break through the School's line. On School's left, Dick and Ripley raced in together, while second's interference crashed into the pair of former enemies as right tackle tried

to go through. But Fred Ripley was as much out for team work this day as any fellow on the field. He made a fast sprint, as though to tackle, yet meaning to do nothing of the sort. Dick, too, understood. He let Ripley get two or three feet in the lead. At Ripley, therefore, the second's interference hurled itself savagely. It was all done so quickly that the beguiled second had no time to rectify its blunder; for Fred Ripley was in the center of the squirming, interfering bunch and Dick Prescott had made a fair, firm, abrupt tackle. In an instant the ball was "down." Second had gained less than a yard.

"Good work!" the coach shouted, after sounding the whistle. "Ripley and Prescott, that was the right sort of team work."

Again second essayed to get away with the ball. This time the forward pass was employed—that is to say, attempted. Hudson and Purcell, by another clever feint, got the ball stopped and down; third time, and second lost the ball on downs.

Now School had the ball. As the quarterback's signals rang out there was perceptible activity and alertness at School's right end. As the ball was snapped, School's right wing went through the needful movements, but Dick Prescott, over at left end, had the ball. Ripley and Purcell were supporting him.

Straight into the opposing ranks went Ripley and Purcell, the rest of the school team supporting. It was team work again. Dick was halted, for an instant. Then, backed by his supporters, he dashed through the opposition—on and on! Twice Dick was on the point of being tackled, but each time his interference carried him through. He was over second's line—touchdown, and the whistle sounded shrilly, just a second ahead of cheers from some hundred onlookers.

As Dick came back he limped just a bit.

"I tell you, it takes nerve, and a lot of it, to play that game," remarked one citizen admiringly.

"Nerve? pooh!" retorted his companion. "Just a hoodlum footrace, with some bumping, and then the whistle blows while a lot of boys are rolling over one another. The whistle always blows just at the point when there might be some use for nerve."

The first speaker looked at his doubtful companion quizzically.

"Would it take any nerve for you," he demanded, "to jump in where you knew there was a good chance of your being killed?"

"Yes; I suppose so," admitted the kicker.

"Well, every season a score or two of football players are killed, or crippled for life."

"But they're not looking for it," objected the kicker, "or they wouldn't go in so swift and hard. Real nerve? I'd believe in that more if I ever heard of one of these nimble-jack racers taking a big chance with his life off the field, and where there was no crowd of wild galoots to look on and cheer!"

"Of course killing and maiming are not the real objects of the game," pursued the first speaker. "Coaches and other good friends of the game are always hoping to discover some forms of rules that will make football safer. Yet I can't help feeling that the present game, despite the occasional loss of life or injury to limb, puts enough of strong, fighting manhood into the players to make the game worth all it costs."

"I want to see the nerve, and I want to see the game prove its worth," insisted the kicker.

Second eleven, though made up of bright, husky boys, was having a hard time of it. Thrice coach arbitrarily advanced the ball for second, in order to give that team a better chance with High School eleven.

And now the practice was over for the afternoon. The whistle between coach's lips sounded three prolonged blasts, and the young players, flushed, perspiring—aching a bit, too—came off the field. Togs were laid aside and

some time was spent under the shower baths and in toweling. Only a small part of the late crowd of watchers remained at the athletic field. But the kicker and his companion were among those who stayed.

Coach Morton stood for a time talking with some citizens who had lingered. As most of these men were contributors to the athletic funds they were anxious for information.

"Do you consider the prospects good for the team this year?" asked one man.

"Yes," replied Mr. Morton promptly.

"Is the School eleven decided upon in detail?" questioned another.

"No; of course not, as yet. Each day some of the young men develop new points—of excellence, or otherwise. The division into School and second teams, that you saw this afternoon, may not be the final division. In fact, not more than five or six of the young men have been definitely picked as sure to make the School team. We shall have it all decided within a few days."

"But you're rather certain," insisted another, "that Gridley is going to have as fine a School team as it has ever had?"

"It would be going too far to say that," replied Coach Morton slowly. "The truth is, we never know anything for certain until we have

seen our boys play through the first game. Our judgment is even more reliable after they've been through the second game."

By this time, some of the football squad were coming out of locker rooms, heading across the field to the gate. Coach Morton and the little group of citizens turned and went along slowly after them. The kicker was still on hand.

Just as the boys neared the gate there were heard sounds of great commotion on the other side of the high board fence. There were several excited yells, the sound of running feet, and then more distinct cries.

"He's bent on killing the officer! Run!"

"Look out! Here he comes! Scoot!"

"He's crazy!"

Then came several more yells, a note of terror in them all.

Five youngsters of the football squad were so near the gate that they broke into a run for the open. Coach Morton, too, sped ahead at full steam, though he was some distance behind the members of the squad. The citizens followed, running and puffing.

Once outside, they all came upon a curious sight. One of the smallest members of Gridley's police force had attempted to stop a big, red-faced, broad-shouldered man who, coatless and hatless, had come running down the street.

Two men had gotten in the way of this fellow and had been knocked over. Then the little policeman had darted in, bent on distinguishing himself. But the red-faced man, crazed by drink, had bowled over the policeman and had fallen on top of him. The victor had begun to beat the police officer when the sight of a rapidly-growing crowd angered the fellow.

Leaping up, the red-faced one had glared about him, wondering whom next to attack, while the officer lay on his back, more than half-dazed.

Making up his mind to catch and thrash some one, the red-faced man came along, shouting savagely. It was just at this moment that Dick Prescott and Greg Holmes, sprinting fast, came out through the gateway.

"Look out, boys! He'll kill you!" shouted one well-meaning citizen in the background.

"Will he?" grunted Dick grimly. "Greg, I'll tackle the fellow—you be ready to fall on him. Head down, now—charge!"

As though they had darted around the right end of the football battle line, and had sighted the enemy's goal line, Prescott and Holmes charged straight for the infuriated fellow.

"Get outer my way!" roared red-face, turning slightly and running furiously at them.

Dick's head was down, but that did not prevent his seeing through his long hair.

"Get out of my way, you kid!" gasped the big fellow, halting in his amazement, as he saw this youngster coming straight at him.

Greg was off the sidewalk, running a few feet out from the gutter.

But Dick sailed straight in. As he came close, red-face seemed to feel uneasy about this reckless boy, for the big fellow, holding his fists so that he could use them, swerved slightly to one side.

Fifty people were looking on, now, most of them amazed and fearing for young Prescott.

But Dick, running still lower, charged straight for his man. The big fellow, with a bellow, aimed his fists.

Dick wasn't hit, however. Instead, he grappled with the fellow, just below the thighs, then straightened up somewhat—all quick as a flash.

That big mountain of flesh swayed, then toppled. Red-face went down, not with a crash, but more after the manner of a collapse.

As he fell, Greg darted in from the street and fell upon the big fellow's chest. In another instant young Prescott was a-top of the fellow.

"Keep him down, boys!" yelled Coach Morton.

Just before the coach sprinted to the spot Dave Darrin, then Tom Reade, and then Tom Purcell, hurled themselves into the fray.

When the coach arrived he could not find a spot on red-face at which to take hold.

The policeman, limping a bit, came up as fast as he could.

"Will you young gentlemen help me to put these handcuffs on?" asked the officer, dangling a pair of steel bracelets.

"Will we?" ejaculated Dave. "Whoop!"

"Roll the fellow over!" called Dick Prescott.

With a gleeful shout the squad members rolled red-face over, dragging his powerful arms behind his back. There was a scuffle, but Coach Morton helped. A minute more and the handcuffs had been snapped in place.

In the eyes of the recent kicker, back on the field, there now appeared a gleam of something very much akin to enthusiasm.

"What do you say, now?" asked that man's companion. "Though, of course, Prescott and Holmes knew that help wasn't far off."

"It doesn't make any difference," retorted the recent kicker. "Either boy might have been killed by that big brute before the help could have arrived."

"Then does football teach nerve?"

"It certainly must!" agreed the recent kicker.

CHAPTER XII

DICK, LIKE CÆSAR, REFUSES THE CROWN

A FEW days later the members of the school team, and the substitutes, had been announced. Then the men who had made the team came together at the gymnasium.

Who was to be captain of the eleven?

For once there seemed to be a good deal of hanging back.

If there were any members of the team who believed themselves supremely fitted to lead, at least they were not egotistical enough to announce themselves.

There was a good deal of whispering during the five minutes before Mr. Morton called them to order. Some of the whisperers left one group to go over to another.

"Now, then, gentlemen!" called Coach Morton. "Order, please!"

Almost at once the murmuring stopped.

"Before we can go much further," continued the coach, "it will be necessary to decide upon a captain. I don't wish to have the whole voice in the matter. If you are to follow your captain through thick and thin, in a dozen or

more pitched football battles, it is well that you should have a leader who will possess the confidence of all. Now, whom do you propose for the post of captain? Let us discuss the merits of those that may be proposed."

Just for an instant the murmuring broke out afresh.

Then a shout went up:

"Purcell!"

But that young man shook his head.

"Prescott!" shouted another.

Dick, too, shook his head.

"Purcell! Purcell!"

"Now, listen to me a moment, fellows!" called Purcell, standing very straight and waving his arms for silence. "I don't want to be captain. I had the honor of leading the baseball nine last season."

"No matter! You'll make a good football captain!"

"Not the best you can get, by any means," insisted Purcell. "I decline the honor for that reason, and also because I don't want the responsibility of leading the eleven."

"Prescott!" shouted three or four of the squad at once.

Purcell nodded his head encouragingly.

"Yes; Prescott, by all means! You can't do better."

"Yes, you can! And you fellows know it!" shouted Dick.

His face glowed with pleasure and pride, but he tried to show, by face, voice and gesture, that he didn't propose to take the tendered honor.

"Prescott! Prescott!" came the insistent yell.

Above the clamor Coach Morton signaled Dick to come forward to the platform.

"Won't you take it, Prescott?" inquired the coach.

"I've no right to, sir."

"Then tell the team why you think so."

As soon as coach had secured silence Dick, with a short laugh, began:

"Fellows, I don't know whether you mean it all, or whether you're having a little fun with me. But——"

"No, no! We mean it! Prescott for captain! No other fellow has done as much for Gridley High School football!"

"Then I'll tell you some reasons, fellows, why I don't fit the position," Dick went on, speaking easily now as his self-confidence came to him. "In the first place, I'm a junior, and this is my first year at football. Now, a captain should be a whole wagon-load in the way of judgment. That means a fellow who has

played in a previous season. For that reason, all other things being equal, the captain should be one of the seniors who played the gridiron game last year."

"You'll do for us, Prescott!" came the insistent call.

"For another thing," Dick went on composedly, "the captain should be a man who plays center, or close to it. Now, I'm not heavy enough for anything of that sort. In fact, I understand I'm cast for left tackle or left end—probably the latter. So, you see, I wouldn't be in the right part of the field. I don't deny that I'd like to be captain, but I'd a thousand times rather see Gridley win."

"Then who can lead us to victory?" demanded Dave Darrin briskly.

"What's the matter with Wadleigh?" asked Dick promptly. "He's believed to be our best man for center. He played last year; he knows more fine points of the game than any of us juniors can. And he has the judgment. Besides, he's a senior, and it's his last chance to command the High School eleven."

"If Wadleigh'll take it, I'm for him," spoke Dave Darrin promptly.

Henry Wadleigh, or "Hen," as he was usually called, was turning all the colors of the rainbow. Yet he looked pleased and anxious.

There was just one thing against Wadleigh, in the minds of Hudson and some of the others. He was a boy of poor family. He belonged to what the late but routed "soreheads" termed "the muckers." But he was an earnest, honest fellow, a hard player and loyal to the death to his school.

"Any other candidates?" asked Coach Morton.

There was a pause of indecision. There were a few other fellows who wanted to captain the team. Why didn't some of their friends put them in nomination?

Dick & Co. formed a substantial element in the team. They were for "Hen" Wadleigh, and now Tom Reade spoke:

"I move that Wadleigh be considered our choice for captain."

"Second the motion," uttered Dan Dalzell, hastily.

Coach Morton put the proposition, which was carried. Wadleigh was chosen captain, subject to the approval of the Athletics Committee of the alumni, which would talk it over in secret with Coach Morton.

And now the team was quickly made up. Wadleigh was to play center. Dick was to play left end, with Dave for left tackle. Greg Holmes went over to right tackle, with Hazel-

ton right guard. Dan Dalzell was slated as substitute right end, while Tom Reade was a "sub" left tackle.

Fred Ripley was put down as a substitute for left end. As one who kept in such close training as did Prescott he was not likely to miss many of the big games, and Fred's chances for playing in the big games was not heavy. Yet Ripley was satisfied. Even as a "sub," he had "made" the High School eleven.

"I think, gentlemen," declared Mr. Morton, in dismissing the squad, "that we have as good a team to put forward this year as Gridley has ever had. The only disquieting feature of the season is the report, coming to us, that many of the rival schools have, this year, better teams in the field than they have ever had before. So we've got to work—well like so many animated furies. Remember, gentlemen, 'cold feet' never won a football season."

Bayliss and Dodge, when they heard the news, were much disgusted. They had hoped that Dick & Co. would be placed mainly among the subs. Instead, Dick and three of his cronies had been put in Gridley's first fighting line, only two of the redoubtable six being on the sub list.

School and second teams, being now sharply defined, fell to playing against each other as hard and as cleverly as they could.

Wadleigh's choice as captain was confirmed by the Athletics Committee.

"But I'd never have had the chance, Prescott, old fellow, if it hadn't been for you," "Hen" protested gratefully. "Dick, I won't forget your great help!"

"I didn't do anything for you, Hen," Prescott retorted, with one of his dry smiles

"You didn't?" gasped Wadleigh.

"No, sir! I did it for the school. I wanted to see our team have the best possible captain and the winning eleven!"

Bert and Bayliss happened to be passing the gymnasium when they heard of the selection of Wadleigh.

"Bert," whispered Bayliss, "I believe you're at least half a man!"

"What are you driving at?" demanded Dodge.

"We owe Dick Prescott a few. If you're with me we'll see if his season on the gridiron can't be made a farce and a fizzle."

CHAPTER XIII

BERT DODGE "STARTS SOMETHING"

AS always happens the schedule of the fall's games was changed somewhat at the last moment.

In the first change there was a decided advantage. Wrexham withdrawing its challenge almost at the last, Coach Morton took on Welton High School for the first game of the season.

Now, Welton must have played for no other reason than to gratify a weak form of vanity, for there were few High School teams in the state that had cause to dread Welton High School.

For Gridley, however, the game served a useful purpose. It solidified Captain Wadleigh's team into actual work. The score was 32 to 0, in favor of Gridley. However, as Dick phrased it, the practice against an actual adversary, for the first time in the season, was worth at least three hundred to nothing.

"But don't you fellows make a mistake," cautioned Captain Wadleigh. "Don't get a notion that you've nothing bigger than Welton to tackle this year. Next Saturday you've got

to go up against Tottenville, and there's an eleven that will make you perspire."

Coach Morton had Tottenville gauged at its right value. During the few days before the game he kept the Gridley boys steadily at work. The passing and the signal work, in particular, were reviewed most thoroughly.

"Remember, the pass is going to count for a lot," Mr. Morton warned them. "You can't make a weight fight against Tottenville, for those fellows weigh a hundred and fifty pounds more, to the team, than you do. They're savage, swift, clever players, too, those Tottenville youths. What you take away from them you'll have to win by strategy."

So the Gridley boys were drilled again and again in all the special points of field strategy that Coach Morton knew or could invent.

Yet one of the best things that Mr. Morton knew, and one that always characterized Gridley, was the matter of confidence.

Captain Wadleigh's young men were made to feel that they were going to win. They did not underestimate the enemy, but they were going to win. That was well understood by them all.

Now, in the games of sheer strategy much depends upon nimble ends.

Dick Prescott, in particular, was coached

much in private, as well as on the actual grid-iron.

"Keep yourself in keen good shape, Mr. Prescott," Mr. Morton insisted. "We need your help in scalping Tottenville next Saturday."

As the week wore along Mr. Morton and Captain Wadleigh became more and more pleased with themselves and with their associates.

"I don't see how we can fail to-morrow," said Mr. Morton, quietly, to "Hen" Wadleigh, just after the School and the second teams had been dismissed.

It was not much after half-past three. Practice had been brief, in order that none of the players might be used up.

"Prescott, in especial, is showing up magnificently," replied Wadleigh. "He and Darrin are certainly wonders at their end of the line."

"You must use them all you can to-morrow, and yet don't make them fight the whole battle," replied Coach Morton. "Save them for the biggest emergencies."

"I'll be careful," promised Wadleigh.

Dick and Dave walked back into the city, instead of taking a car.

"How are you feeling, Dick?" asked Dave.

"As smooth as silk," Prescott replied.

"I don't believe I've ever been in such fine condition before," replied Dave.

"That's mighty good, for I have an idea that the captain means to use us all he can to-morrow."

"Oh, Tottenville is as good as beaten, then," laughed Dave, with all the Gridley confidence.

"I'd like to know just how strong Tottenville is on its right end of the line," mused Prescott.

"I don't care how strong they are," retorted Darrin, with a laugh. "You and I are not going to use strength; we're going to rely upon brains—Coach Morton's brains, though, to be sure."

The two chums separated at the corner of the side street on which stood the Prescott bookstore and home. Dave hurried home to attend to some duties that he knew were awaiting him.

Dick, whistling, strolled briskly on. He saw Dodge and Bayliss on the other side of the street, but did not pay much attention to them until they crossed just before Dick had reached his own door.

"There's the mucker," muttered Bayliss, in a tone intentionally loud enough for the young left end to overhear.

"I won't pay any attention to them," thought Dick, with an amused smile. "I can easily un-

derstand what they're sore about. I'd feel angry myself if I had been left off the team."

"Why do fellows like that need an education?" demanded Dodge, in a slightly louder tone, as the pair came closer.

Still Dick Prescott paid no heed. He started up the steps, fumbling for his latch key as he went.

"You faker! You mucker!" hissed Bayliss, now speaking directly to the young left end.

This was so palpable that Dick could not well ignore it. Dropping the key back into his pocket, he turned to stare at the two "sore-head" chums.

"Eh?" he asked, with a quiet laugh.

"Yes; I meant you!" hissed Bayliss.

"Oh, well," grinned Dick, "your opinions have never counted for much in the community, have they?"

"Shut up, you ignorant hound!" warned Bayliss belligerently.

"Too bad," retorted Dick tantalizingly. "Of course, I understand what ails you. You were left off the High School team, and I was not. But that is your own fault, Bayliss. You could have made the team if you hadn't been foolish."

"Don't insult me with your opinions, fellow!" cried Bayliss, growing angrier every in-

stant. At least, he appeared to be working himself up into a rage.

"Oh, I don't care anything about your opinions, and I have no anxiety to spring mine on you," retorted Dick, in an indifferent voice. Once more he fumbled for his latch key.

"You haven't any business talking with gentlemen, anyway," sneered Bert Dodge.

Dick flushed slightly, though he replied, coolly:

"As it happens, just at present I am not!"

"What do you mean by that?" flared Bert.

"Oh, you know, you don't care anything about my opinions," laughed Dick. "Let us drop the whole subject. I don't care particularly, anyway, about being seen talking with you two."

"Oh, you don't?" cried Bayliss, in a voice hoarse with rage.

In almost the same breath Bert Dodge hurled an insult so pointed and so offensive that Dick's ruddy cheek went white for an instant.

Back into his pocket he dropped the latch key, then stepped swiftly down before his tormentor.

"Dodge," he cried warningly, "take back the remark you just made. Then, after that, you can take your offensive presence out of my sight!"

"I'll take nothing back!" sneered the other boy.

"Then you'll take this!" retorted Dick, very quietly, in a cold, low voice.

Prescott's fist flew out. It was not a hard blow, but it landed on the tip of Bert Dodge's nose.

"You cur!" cried Dodge chokingly. "Wait until I get my coat off."

"No; keep it on; I'm going to keep mine on," retorted Prescott. "Guard yourself, man!"

"Jump in, Bayliss! We'll thump his head off!" gasped Dodge, with almost a sob in his voice, he was so angry.

Bayliss would have been nothing loath to "jump in." But, just as Dick Prescott, after calling "guard," aimed his second blow at Bert, Fred Ripley, Purcell and "Hen" Wadleigh all hurried up to the scene.

For Bayliss to be caught fighting two-to-one would have resulted in a quick thrashing for him. So Bayliss stood back.

"Bad blood, is there?" asked Wadleigh, as the new arrivals hurried up.

"Prescott, after insulting Bert, flew at him," retorted Bayliss, panting some with the effort at lying.

Dodge was now standing well back. He had parried three of Dick's blows, but had not yet

taken the offensive. As Dodge was a heavier man, and not badly schooled in fistics, Dick had the good sense to go at this fight coolly, taking time to exercise his judgment.

"What's it all about?" demanded Wadleigh.

Just for an instant Bayliss felt himself stumped. Then, all of a sudden, an inspiration in lying came to him.

"Prescott got ugly because the Dodges never paid that thousand-dollar reward," declared Bayliss.

Dick heard, and with his eye still on Dodge, shouted out: "That's not true, Bayliss. You know you are not telling the truth!"

Bayliss doubled his fists, and would have struck Prescott down from behind, but Wadleigh, who was a big and powerful fellow, caught Bayliss by his left arm, jerking him back.

"Now, just wait a bit, Bayliss," advised "Hen," moderately. "From what I know of Prescott I'm not afraid but that he'll give you satisfaction presently—if you want it."

"You bet he'll have to!" hissed Bayliss.

"If Prescott loses the argument he has on now," added Purcell, significantly, "I fancy he has friends who will take his place with you, Bayliss."

Then all turned to watch the fight, which

was now passing the stage of preliminary caution.

Several boys and men had run down from Main Street. Now, more than a score of spectators were crowding about.

"Hurrah!" piped up one boy from the Central Grammar School. "The mucker bantam against the 'sorehead' lightweight!"

There was a laugh, but Bert Dodge didn't join in it, for, after receiving two glancing blows on the chest, he now had his right eye closed by Dick's hard left.

The next instant the bewildered Dodge received a blow that sent him down to the sidewalk.

"I think I've paid you back, now," Prescott remarked quietly.

At this moment Mr. Prescott, hearing the noise from the back of his bookstore, came to the door.

"What is the trouble, Richard?" inquired his parent.

Dick stepped over to his father, repeating, in a low voice, the insult that Dodge had hurled at him.

"You couldn't have done anything else, then!" declared the elder Prescott, fervently; and this was a good deal for Dick's father, quiet, scholarly and peace-loving, to say.

Bert and Bayliss walked sullenly away amid the jeers of the onlookers. Once out of their sight, Bert, fairly grinding his teeth, said:

"Bayliss, I'll have my revenge yet on that mucker Prescott——" and then, as if struck by a sudden thought, he added savagely:

"The Tottenville game's to-morrow—you know?"

"Yes?" said Bayliss inquiringly.

"Well, wait till to-morrow afternoon, and I'll take the conceit out of the miserable cur —just you wait."

CHAPTER XIV

THE "STRATEGY" OF A SCHOOL TRAITOR

"RAH! rah! *Gri-i-idley!*"

Again and again the whole of the rousing, inspiring High School yell smote the air.

It was but a little after noon on Saturday.

It seemed as though two thirds of the school, including most of the girls, had come down to the railway station to see the High School eleven off on its way to Tottenville. That city was some thirty miles away from Gridley, but there was a noon express train that went through in forty minutes.

Coach Morton and Captain Wadleigh had rounded up the whole of the school team. All of the subs were there. The coach and members of the team were at no expense in the matter, since their expenses were to be paid out of the gate receipts of the home eleven.

To many of the boys and girls of Gridley High School, however, the affair bore a different look. The round trip by rail would cost each of these more than a dollar, with another fifty cents to pay for a seat on the grand stand at Tottenville.

Hence, despite the fine representation of High School young folks at the railway station, not all of them were so fortunate as to look forward to going to the game.

In addition to those of the young people who could go, there were more than three hundred grown-ups who had bought tickets. The railroad company, having been notified by the local agent, had added a second section to the noon express.

And now they waited, enthusiasm finding vent in volleys of cheers and the school war-whoop.

Dick Prescott and his chums stood at one end of the platform. Nor were they alone. Many admirers had gathered about them. Laura Bentley and Belle Meade, who were going

with the rest to Tottenville, were chatting with Dick and Dave. Each of the girls carried the Gridley High School colors to wave during the expected triumphs of the afternoon.

"I'm glad you're playing to-day," Laura almost whispered to young Prescott.

"Why?" smiled Dick.

"Why, I believe you're one of those fortunate people who always carry their mascot with them," rejoined Miss Bentley earnestly. "With you there, Dick, I feel absolutely certain that even Tottenville must go down in the dust. Gridley will bring back the score—and not a tied score, either."

"I certainly hope I am as big a mascot, or possess as big a mascot as you seem to believe," laughed young Prescott.

"You and Dave are each other's mascots," declared Belle Meade, with a laugh. "I remember that last year when you were both on the baseball nine Gridley never lost a game in which you and Dave both played."

"Nor did the nine lose any other game," returned Dick, "though there were some games when Dave and I weren't on the batting list. The nine didn't lose a game last season, Miss Belle, and had only one tied score."

"Anyway," declared Laura, with great conviction, "it all comes back to this—that Grid-

ley can't lose to-day because both Prescott and Darrin are to play."

"And I believe, young ladies, that you're both much nearer to the truth than you have any idea of. In to-day's game a great deal does depend on Prescott and Darrin."

It was Captain "Hen" Wadleigh, who, passing to the rear of the group, had overheard Laura's remark, and had made this addition to her prophecies.

"Here comes the train!" yelled one youth, who was fortunate enough to have a ticket for the day.

Soon after the sound of the whistle had been heard the express rolled in. But this was the first section of the regular train. By some effort the football crowd was kept off the train. Soon after the second section of the train was sighted as it rolled toward the station.

"Team assemble!" roared Captain Wadleigh.

There was a rush of husky, mop-headed youths in his direction.

Just then a hand rested on Dick's arm.

"Let me speak with you, just a moment, Prescott."

As Dick turned he found himself looking into the face of Hemingway, plain clothes man to Chief Coy of the police department.

"I'm awful sorry, lad, but——" began Hemingway slowly, in a tone of the most genuine regret.

Dick's face blanched. He scented bad news instantly, though he could not imagine what it was.

"Anyone sick—any accident at home?" asked the young left end.

"Team aboard, first day coach behind the smoker!" roared Captain Wadleigh, and the fellows made a rush.

"The truth is," confessed Hemingway, "I've a war——"

Dick saw light in an instant.

"Oh, that wretched Dodge? He has——"

"Sworn out a warrant for your arrest," nodded Hemingway.

Laura and Belle did not hear or see this. They were hurrying rearward along the train.

Few of the football fellows saw the trouble, for they were busy boarding the car named by Captain Wadleigh.

Dave Darrin was the only one to pay urgent heed.

"See here, Hemingway," began Dave, "Dick will come back—you know that. He's desperately needed to-day. Won't it do just as well——"

"No," broke in the plain-clothes man, re-

luctantly. "I'd have done that if possible, but Dodge's father put the warrant in my hand and insisted."

"He?" echoed Darrin, bitterly. "The very man that Dick and I rescued when he was out of his head and in the clutches of scoundrels? He? Oh, this is infamous—or crazy!"

"I know it is," nodded Officer Hemingway sympathetically. "But what am I to do when——"

"Hustle aboard, there, you Prescott and Darrin!" roared Captain Wadleigh's voice from an open window.

"You hear, Hemingway?" urged Dave.

"Yes; but I can't help it," sighed the policeman.

"We're not going—can't——" fluttered Darrin. His voice was low, but it reached the captain of the eleven.

"What's that?" roared Wadleigh, making a dash for the door of the car. "Keep your seats, you other fellows. I——"

"You go, Dave—you must!" commanded Dick. "Hurry! The train is starting. Hustle! Play for both of us."

Dick gave his chum a push that was compelling. Dave yielded, boarding the step as the end of the car went by him.

"What——" began Wadleigh, breathlessly.

"I'll explain," panted Darrin angrily.

The train was now in full motion.

"Hey, dere! Stop dot train, quick! Me! I am not off board, yet!"

It was Herr Schimmelpodt, hot, perspiring and gasping, who now raced upon the platform. For one of his weight, combined with his lack of nimbleness, it was hazardous to attempt to board the moving train.

Yet Herr Schimmelpodt made a wild dash for the train. He would have been mangled or killed, had not Officer Hemingway caught the anxious German and pulled him back.

"Hey, you! Vot for you do dot?" screamed Herr Schimmelpodt. "Hey? Answer me dot vun, dumm-gesicht!" (Foolish-faced one.)

"I did it to save you from going under the wheels," retorted Officer Hemingway dryly.

"Und now I don't go me by dot game today!" groaned Herr Schimmelpodt. "Me! I dream apout dot game all der veek, und now I don't see me by it."

"But, man——"

"Hal's maul." (Literally, "Shut your mouth!")

"Me! Und I vouldn't lose dot game for ein dollar!" glared the prosperous German.

He stared after the departed second section, from the open windows of which fluttered or

wildly waved many a banner; for few of the Gridley crowd had yet discovered that one of the most prized members of the team had been left behind.

Herr Schimmelpodt it was, who, a wealthy retired contractor, had found his second youth in his enthusiasm over the High School baseball nine the season before.

Though thrifty enough in most matters, the German had become a liberal contributor to the High School athletic fund, to the great dismay of his good wife, who feared that his new outdoor fads would yet land them both in the poorhouse.

"Vot you doing here, Bresgott?" demanded Herr Schimmelpodt, turning upon the young prisoner. "Vy you ain't by dot elefen? How dey going to vin bis you are behint left?"

"You have company in your misery, sir," said Officer Hemingway. "I'm awfully sorry to say that Dick Prescott can't see to-day's game, either. It's a whopping shame, but sometimes the law is powerless to do right."

"What foolishness are you talking mit, vonce alretty?" demanded Herr Schimmelpodt, looking bewildered.

"I've just been arrested, on a false charge of assault," Dick stated quietly.

"You? Und you don't blay by der game

yet? By der beard of Charlemagne," howled Herr Schimmelpodt excitedly, "ve see apoud dot!"

Digging down into a trouser's pocket this enthusiastic old High School "rooter" brought up a roll of bills almost as large around as a loaf of bread.

CHAPTER XV

A "FACER" FOR THE PLOTTER

"WHAT are you going to do with all that wallpaper, Mr. Schimmelpodt?" laughed Officer Hemingway.

"Me? I gif bail, don't I?" demanded the German.

"Well, you can't do it here. That's a matter to be fixed in court."

"Und dot train going by a mile a minute, I bet you!" gasped the German ruefully.

"Come along, lad," urged Hemingway gently. "On Saturdays court opens at one o'clock. We'll get right up there and see this matter through."

"I bet you ve see dis matter through—right through someone, ain't it?" exploded Herr Schimmelpodt, ranging himself on the other side of the young prisoner.

As they went along the German, using all his native and acquired shrewdness, quickly got at the bottom of the matter.

In the meantime indignant Dave Darrin was telling all he knew about the business to an indignant lot of High School youngsters in the day coach.

"You keep your upper eyebrow stiff, Bresgott," urged the warm-hearted German. "I see you through by dis business. Don't you worry."

"Thank you, but it isn't the arrest that is really bothering me," Prescott answered. "It's the fact that I'm fooled out of playing this afternoon. And Darrin and I had been trained for so many special tricks for to-day's game that I'm almost afraid my absence will make a difference in the score. But, Herr Schimmelpodt, if you want to help me, do you really mind dropping in at the store and telling my father, so that he can come down to the court room? Yet please be careful not to scare Dad. He has a horror of courts and criminal law."

"I bet you I do der chob—slick," promised the German, and hurried away.

"There goes a man that's all right, from his feet up to the top of his head," declared Officer Hemingway.

On the streets Dick's appearance with Hem-

ingway attracted little notice. Folks were used to seeing the High School reporter of "The Blade" walking with this policeman-detective. The few who really did notice merely wondered why Dick Prescott was not on his way to the Tottenville gridiron to-day.

When Hemingway and his prisoner reached the court room there were only two or three loungers there, for it was still some minutes before the time for the assembling of the court.

Presently Bert Dodge and his friend, Bayliss, dropped in. They glanced at the young left end with no attempt to conceal their feelings of triumph. Bert looked much the worse for wear.

Dick returned their looks coolly, but without defiance. He was angry only that he should have been cheated of his right to play in that big game.

Then in came the elder Dodge, only just back from a sanitarium. Beside him walked Lawyer Ripley, who immediately came over to Dick, just before Herr Schimelpodt and Dick's father entered the room hastily.

"Prescott," began the old lawyer, sitting down beside the young player, and speaking in a low tone, "I've just been called into this matter, as I'm the Dodge family lawyer. Had my advice been asked I would have demanded much

more investigation. From what knowledge I have of you, I don't regard you as one who is likely to commit an unprovoked assault. Have you any objection to stating your side of the case—bearing in mind, of course, the fact that I'm the Dodge lawyer."

"Not the least in the world," Dick replied promptly.

It was just at this moment that Herr Schimmelpodt and the elder Prescott came hastening into the room.

Bert Dodge and Bayliss looked over uneasily, several times, to where Lawyer Ripley and the young prisoner sat. Dick's father stood by in silence. He already knew his son's version of the affair of the day before. Herr Schimmelpodt didn't say anything, but sat down, breathing heavily.

Then the clerk of the court and two court officers came in. Justice Vesey entered soon after and took his seat on the bench.

"The case of Dodge versus Prescott—I mean, the people against Prescott, your honor, is the only thing on the docket this afternoon," explained the clerk.

"Is the case ready?" inquired the justice mildly.

"I will ask just a moment's delay, your, Honor," announced Lawyer Ripley, rising. "I

wish a moment's conference with my principals."

The court nodding, Mr. Ripley crossed the room, engaging in earnest whispered conversation with the Dodges, father and son.

While this was going on a telegraph messenger boy entered. Espying Dick, he went over and handed him a yellow envelope. Dick tore it open. It was a telegram sent by Dave Darrin, on the way to Tottenville, and read:

"Fred Ripley said he heard insult offered you by Dodge yesterday. Get case adjourned to Monday and Ripley will testify in your behalf."

Smiling, Dick passed the message to his father. Mr. Prescott, after scanning the telegram, rose gravely, crossed the room and handed the slip of paper to Lawyer Ripley.

"If the court please, we are now ready with this case," announced Lawyer Ripley.

"Proceed, counselor. Mr. Clerk, you will swear such witnesses as are to be called."

"If the court please," hastily interjected Mr. Ripley. "I don't believe it is going to be necessary to call any witnesses. With the court's permission I will first make a few explanations."

"This case, your Honor, is one in which Albert Dodge, a minor, with the consent of his father, has preferred a charge of aggravated assault against Richard Prescott, a minor.

"That there was a fight, and that said Prescott did vigorously assault young Dodge, there is no doubt. Prescott himself does not deny it. But I am satisfied, if it please the court, that the case is one in which, on the evidence, young Prescott is bound to be discharged. I am satisfied that young Prescott had abundant provocation for the assault he committed. Further, we have received apparently satisfactory assurance by wire that a witness is prepared to testify to conduct and speech, on the part of young Dodge, that would justify an assault, or, as the boys call it, 'a fight.' Now, your Honor, if the prisoner, Prescott, through his father, will agree to hold the elder Dodge blameless in the matter of civil damages on account of this arrest, I shall move to have the case dismissed."

"Will you so agree, Mr. Prescott?" inquired the court, glancing at Dick's father.

"Yes," agreed the elder Prescott, "though I must offer my opinion that this arrest has been a shameful outrage."

"My client, the elder Dodge——" began Lawyer Ripley, in a low voice.

"Case dismissed," broke in Justice Vesey briskly, and Mr. Ripley did not finish his remark.

Bowing to the court, Dick rose, picked up his hat and started out with his father.

But once outside Herr Schimmelpodt caught them both by the arm.

"Vait!" he commanded. "I much vant to hear me vot Lawyer Ripley haf to say to dot young scallavag."

"Are you talking about me?" demanded Bert Dodge, flushingly hotly, for, just at that moment, he turned out of the court room into the corridor.

"Maybe," assented Herr Schimmelpodt.

"Then stuff a sausage in your Dutch mouth, and be quiet," retorted Bert impudently.

"Young man, if your father haf not enough gontrol ofer you, den I vill offer him dot I teach you manners by a goot spanking," replied Herr Schimmelpodt stiffly.

"Bert, you will be silent before your elders," ordered Mr. Dodge. "You have come close enough to getting me into trouble to-day. Had I understood the whole story of the fight, as I do now, I never would have backed your application for a warrant. If you meet with any rebuke from young Prescott's friends, take it in meekness, for you richly deserve censure."

"As you are only a boy, Bert, and I am your father's lawyer," broke in Mr. Ripley, even more sternly, "I have used whatever powers of persuasion I may have to have this case ended mildly. The Prescotts might have sued your

father for a round sum in damages for false arrest. And, if you and Bayliss had sworn falsely as to the nature and causes of the fight, you might both have been sent away to the reformatory on charges of perjury. Remember that the law against false swearing applies to boys as much as it does to men. And now, good day, Mr. Dodge. I trust you will be able to convince your son of his wrongdoing."

However, the elder Dodge, despite his momentary sternness, was not a parent who exercised much influence over his son. Half an hour later Bert had out the family runabout, making fast time toward Tottenville.

"Bert," said Bayliss, rather soberly, "I'm inclined to think that Lawyer Ripley was good enough to get us out of a fearful scrape."

"That's what he's paid for," sniffed Bert. "He's my father's lawyer."

"Then I'm glad your father has a good lawyer. Whew! It makes me sick when I stop to think that we might have been trapped into giving—er—prejudiced testimony, and that then we might have been shipped off to the reformatory until we're of age!"

"Ain't Fred Ripley the sneak, though!" ejaculated Bert angrily. "The idea of him standing ready to 'queer' a case against his father's clients! I thought Fred had more class

and caste than to go against his own crowd for the sake of a mere mucker!"

"Well, the thing turned out all right, anyway," muttered Bayliss. "We're off in time to see the game."

"And that's more than Dick Prescott will do to-day," laughed Bert sullenly. "He can't catch a train to Tottenville, now, in time for the game."

"If Gridley loses the game to-day," hinted Bayliss, "I suppose the fellows will all feel that it was because Prescott didn't go along. Then they'll all feel like roasting us."

"Oh, bother what the High School ninnies think—or say," grunted Bert.

Fifteen minutes later there was a loud popping sound. Then a tire flattened out, so that it became necessary for the young men to get out and busy themselves with putting on another tire. At this task they did not succeed very well until, finally, another automobilist came along and gave the boys effective help.

So it was that, by the time the pair reached Tottenville, housed the car at a garage, and reached Tottenville's High School athletic field, the game was well on.

As the two young men reached the grand stand the Gridley contingent were on their feet, breathless.

Gridley had the ball down to the ten-yard line from Tottenville's goal. Captain Wadleigh's signals were ringing out, crisp and clear. A whistle sounded.

Then the ball was put swiftly into play. Tottenville put up a sturdy resistance against Gridley's left end.

Dave Darrin had the ball, and appeared to be trying to break through the Tottenville line, well backed by Gridley's interference.

Of a sudden there was a subtle, swift pass, and Gridley's left end darted along, almost parallel with the ten-yard line, then made a dashing cut around and past Tottenville.

Two of the home team tackled that left end, but he shook them off. In another instant——

"Touchdown!" yelled the frantic Gridley boosters.

"Touchdown! Oh, you Darrin! Oh, you Prescott!"

Bert Dodge rubbed his eyes.

"Prescott?" he muttered.

"Blazes, but that is Prescott!" faltered Bayliss, with a sickly grin.

"How did he ever get over here in time to play?" demanded Bert Dodge.

Herr Schimmelpodt could have told. The stout, sport-loving old contractor had parted with some of his greenbacks to a chauffeur who

had put Dick and himself over the long road to Tottenville. And the young left end was playing, to-day, in his finest form!

CHAPTER XVI

"THE CATTLE CAR FOR YOURS"

IT was Dave Darrin who kicked the goal. This ran the score up to six to nothing in Gridley's favor.

It was the first scoring in a game that had begun by looking all bad for Gridley.

The Tottenville High School boys were bigger than the visitors and fully as speedy.

In fact, even now, to impartial observers, it looked as though these six points on the score had been won by what was little better than a fluke.

"Gridley can't keep this up," remarked the Tottenville boosters confidently. "They'll lose their wind and nerve against our fine line before the game is much older."

The first half went out with score unchanged. But Captain Wadleigh did heave a sigh of relief when the time keeper cut in on that first half.

"Fellows, look out for the fine points," he warned his fellows, after they had trotted into

quarters. "It'll be craft, not strong rush, that wins for us to-day, if anything does."

"Prescott's here. He and Darrin can put anything over in the line of craft," laughed Fred Ripley.

Ripley was in togs, but was not playing. He was on the sub line, to-day, awaiting a call in case any player of his team became disabled.

"Darrin and Prescott are all right," nodded Wadleigh gruffly. "But they have endurance limits, like other human beings. Don't rely too much upon any two or three men, fellows. Now, in the second half"—here Wadleigh lowered his voice—"I'm going to spare Prescott and Darrin all I can. So you other fellows look out for hard work."

Dick's eyes were still flashing. This was not from the fever of the game, but from the recollection of how narrowly he had escaped being tricked out of this chance to play to-day.

On his arrival, and while dressing before the game, Prescott had related to the team the mean trick that had been played upon him. He had also told how the case came out in court.

"Dodge and Bayliss are traitors to the school!" cried Purcell indignantly. "We'll have to give 'em the silence!"

"Hear! Hear!" cried several of the fellows. This, in other words, meant that Dodge and

Bayliss would be "sent to Coventry"—shut off from all social contact with the school body during the remainder of the school year.

"I think I'm with you, fellows," nodded Captain Wadleigh. "However, remember that the football team can't settle all school questions. We'll take this up when we get back to Gridley."

In the second half it was not long before Gridley did go stale and tired. But so, too, to the disgust of home boosters, did the Tottenville High School boys.

The game became a sheer test of endurance. Gridley, under Wadleigh, played with a doggedness that made Tottenville put forth all its strength.

"Brace up, you lobsters," growled Captain Grant of the home team, after the whistle had sounded on Tottenville's "down" with the ball. "Buck the simple Gridley youths. Wade through their line as if you fellows were going to dinner half an hour late. Don't let them wind you, or stop you!"

Tottenville threw all its force into the following plays. Surely, doggedly, the home boys forced the ball down the gridiron. At last Gridley was forced to make a safety, thus scoring two points for their opponents.

"Don't let that happen again, fellows," urged

Wadleigh anxiously. "Fight for time, but don't throw any two-spots away."

"Rally, men! Brace! Crush 'em!" ordered Captain Grant. "Seven minutes left! We've got to score."

These muttered orders caused a grim smile among the Tottenville High School boys, for the only way to tie the score would be to force Gridley to make two more safeties—a hard thing to do against a crack eleven in seven minutes!

Dick and Dave Darrin were called into play as soon as the visitors had the ball in their own hands once more.

The "trick" signal sounded from quarter-back's lips.

"One—three—seven—eleven!"

There was instant, seemingly sly activity on the part of Gridley's right wing. Those from Gridley who stood on the grand stand thought that the coming play looked bad in advance.

"Why don't they use Prescott again?" asked some one anxiously. "He has been having a vacation.'"

Then followed the snap-back. Quarter-back started with the ball, and it looked as though he would dash for the right.

The quarter took one step, then wheeled like lightning, and rushed after Darrin, who already was in swift motion.

Gridley's whole line switched for the left.

Tottenville found out the trick after the heaviest fellows in its line had started for Gridley's right.

"Oh, Darrin—sprint! Oh, you Prescott!"

Truly the boosters were howling themselves hoarse.

There was frenzy on in an instant.

To the knowing among the watchers there was no chance for Gridley to rush down on the enemy's goal line, but every yard—every foot, now—carried the pigskin just so much further from Gridley's goal line.

Gridley's interference rushed in solidly about Dave Darrin, as though to boost him through.

Dick seemed bent on beating down some of the formation surging against the visitors.

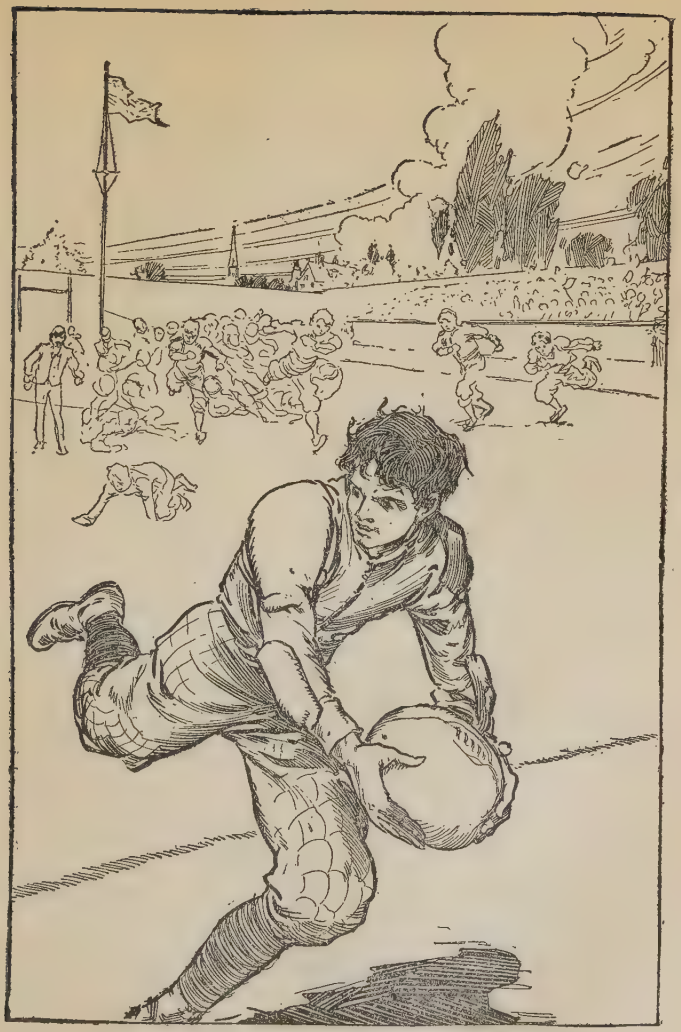
Just as the bunch "clumped" Dave Darrin went down. There was a surge over him, and then Dick Prescott was seen racing as though for life.

There was no opposition left—only Tottenville's quarter-back and the fullback.

Tottenville's quarter got after fleeting Dick too late, for the whole movement had been one of startling trickery.

One Tottenville halfback was too far away to make an obstructing dash in time.

In dodging the other halfback Dick dashed



Dick Carries the Ball Over the Goal Line.

on as though not seeing the fellow. This, however, was all trick. Just in the nick of time Prescott, still holding the ball, ducked and dodged far to the left, getting around his man.

Tottenville's fullback was now the sole hope of the home team.

Prescott, however, dodged that heavy fellow, also.

From the Gridley boosters on the grand stand went up a medley of yells that dinned in the young left end's ears. Panting, all but fainting, Dick was over the enemy's goal line and he had the ball down.

When Dave had emerged from that fruitless clumping he had a broad grin on his face. He saw that while Dick was not yet over the goal line, only the fullback was in the way and the fullback was no match for Dick in the matter of speed.

Then the yells told the rest. Back came the ball. Captain Wadleigh nodded to Dave to kick the goal.

Captain Grant looked utterly wild. He had assured everyone in Tottenville who had asked him that the Gridley "come ons" would be eaten alive. And here——!

Dave made the kick. After going down in that bunch Darrin was not at his best. Body

and nerves were tired. He failed to kick the goal.

Hardly, however, had the two teams been started in a new line-up when the time keeper did his trick. The game was over.

That last kick had failed, but who cared? The score was eleven to two!

Ere the players could escape from the field the Gridley boosters were over on the gridiron.

Dick and Dave were bodily carried to dressing quarters. Wadleigh, who had shown fine generalship in this stiff game was cheered until the boosters went hoarse.

"Gentlemen," cried Coach Morton, raising his voice to its fullest carrying power as the dressing quarters filled, "it's probably too early to brag, but I feel that we've got an old-fashioned Gridley eleven this year."

"Ask Grant!"

"Ask anybody in Tottenville!"

The first yell was sent up by Ripley, the second by another substitute.

All the Gridley members of the team were excited at the close of this game. Not even their weariness kept down their spirits.

Herr Schimmelpodt didn't attempt to enter quarters. He was now too much of a "sport" to attempt that. But he stood just outside the door, vigorously mopping his shining, wet face.

There were two extra places in the German's hired car. Dave, of course, was asked to fill one of these, and Captain Wadleigh was invited to take the fifth seat.

More dejected than ever were Bert Dodge and his chum, Bayliss, as they slouched away from the grounds. They did not attempt to invade the gridiron and join in the triumphal procession to quarters.

"You can't seem to down that fellow Prescott," muttered Bayliss, in disgust. "Just as you think you've got him by the throat you find out that he's sitting on your chest and pulling your hair."

"Oh, I don't know," growled Dodge sulkily. "He may have his weak spot, and it may be a very weak spot at that."

The pair moped along until they reached the garage in which they had left the runabout.

Bayliss was standing near the doorway, while Bert inspected the machinery of the car.

"Psst! Look out there," muttered Bayliss, stepping back from the open doorway.

"What is it?" demanded Bert. "Oh, I see! Old Schimmelpodt brought the beggar Prescott over here in an auto. That's how the fellow managed to get into the game, after all. Well, what of it all, anyway?"

"That car is running along slowly, and it has

a full-sized crowd in it," muttered Bayliss, going closer to his crony. "Wadleigh, Prescott and Darrin—and maybe the chauffeur is a thick friend of theirs."

"What on earth are you driving at?" demanded Dodge, glancing up.

"Bert, I don't believe I'm wholly stuck on the scheme of us driving back to Gridley. There are too many lonely spots along the road.

"Do you think they'd assassinate us?" jeered Bert.

"I—I think Wadleigh may have formed the notion of stopping us and giving us a thrashing," responded Bayliss.

"Bosh!" snapped Dodge quickly.

Yet, none the less, he paused and looked thoughtful.

"There's more than one road to Gridley, old fellow," muttered Bert uneasily. "You see Schimmelpodt and that mucker didn't pass us on the way here."

"But I think they're likely to have guessed our road," persisted Bayliss. "There was an ugly look on Wadleigh's face, too, as that car drove past here."

"But old Schimmelpodt wouldn't stand for anything disorderly and—unlawful," urged Bert.

"I don't know about that," retorted Bayliss

significantly. "That old German has gone crazy over High School sports. He might stand in for 'most anything. You know, he offered your Dad to give you a spanking this afternoon."

The thought of Herr Schimmelpodt's big and capable-looking hands caused Bert to shiver a bit uneasily. Yet he didn't want to admit that he was scared. He glanced at his watch.

"We've time to catch the regular train back, I suppose, Bayliss."

"Let's do it, then," begged the other.

"Will you pay a chauffeur to take this car home, then?"

"I'll pay half," volunteered Bayliss eagerly.

"All right, then; if you're pretty near broke, we'll divide the cost," agreed Dodge.

An arrangement was easily made with the owner of the garage. Then, the charges paid, this pair of cronies, who considered themselves much better than the usual run of High School boys, hurried over to the railway station.

The train was waiting by the time that the pair arrived. Bert and Bayliss hastily purchased tickets, then boarded the handiest car. The train proved to contain few people except the Gridley student body and boosters from that town.

"Here, what are you fellows doing in here?"

angrily demanded Purcell, as the cronies entered one of the cars.

"We're going to ride to Gridley, if you've no objections," replied Bert, with sulky defiance.

"No, sir; not in this car!" declared Purcell promptly. "Too many decent people here. The cattle car for yours!"

"Oh, shut up!" retorted Dodge, trying to shove into a vacant seat.

But Purcell gripped him and pushed him back.

"No, siree! Not in here! The cattle car is your number."

"You——"

"We'll pitch you off the train if you have the cheek to try to ride in this car," insisted Purcell.

High School boys, when off on a junket of this kind, are likely to be as wild as college boys. A score of the Gridley youths now jumped up. It looked as though there were going to be a riot.

"Oh, come on," snarled Bayliss, plucking his crony's sleeve. "We don't want to ride with this truck, anyway."

Into the next car stamped the two young men, their faces red with anger and shame.

"Sneaks!" piped up some one.

CHAPTER XVII

FACING THE "SCHOOL CUT"

AT the instant of their entrance into the car the air had been full of merry chatter.

There were many High School girls in this car, and not many vacant seats.

As the word "sneaks" sounded through the car everyone turned around.

Bert and Bayliss found themselves uncomfortably conspicuous.

At once all the talk and laughter ceased. Stony silence followed.

One of the girls was sitting alone in a seat.

Bayliss, unable to endure the situation any longer, glided forward, dropping into the vacant place.

"That seat is engaged," the girl coolly informed him.

So Bayliss, redder than ever, hurriedly rose.

Bert had already started for the next car. Bayliss slunk along after him.

"Sneaks!" cried some one, as they showed their faces in still the next car forward.

Here, too, all the chatter stopped at once.

Bert, pulling his hat down over his eyes, went

hurriedly past the boys and girls of Gridley, and into the next car.

Bayliss followed with the fidelity and closeness of a little dog.

Now, the next car ahead proved to be the smoking car. Here, at any rate, the despised pair could find safe harborage.

But one of the men of Gridley, who had followed the football team this day, and who had got an inkling of the story of the arrest, removed a cigar from between his lips and pointed an accusing finger at the boys.

"See here, you fellows!" he shouted. "This car is exclusively for men. Can you take a hint?"

"But we've got to sit somewhere," flashed Bert defiantly.

"I don't know as that's necessary, either," retorted the Gridley man. "At least, I don't care if it is. After your dirty little trick, today, we don't want you in here among men. Do we, neighbors?"

There were many mutterings, some cat-calls and at least a score of men rose.

"You let me alone, you fellows!" yelled Bert Dodge, as he made a break for the front end of the car. "Don't any of you dare to get fresh with me!"

By the time he had reached the front end of

the car Bert was almost sobbing with anger and shame.

Bayliss had followed, white and silent.

In the baggage car, to their relief, the sole railway employee there did not object to their presence.

Bert and his crony found seats on two trunks side by side.

"Dodge," whispered Bayliss unsteadily, after the train had pulled out from Tottenville, "I'm afraid we're in bad with the school push."

"Afraid?" sneered Bert. "Man, don't you know it?"

"Well, it's all your fault—this whole confounded row!"

"Oh, you're going to play welcher, are you?" sneered Bert. "Humph! By morning you'll be a full-fledged mucker!"

"Don't you worry about that," argued Bayliss, though rather stiffly. "I know my family —and my caste."

"I should hope so," rejoined Dodge, with just a shade more cordiality.

Rather than alight at Gridley, and face the whole High School crowd—for scores who had not been able to meet the expense of the trip to Tottenville would be sure to be at the station to meet the victorious team—Bert and Bay-

liss rode on to the next station, then got off and walked two miles back to town.

By Monday morning the punishment of the pair was made complete.

Bert and Bayliss walked to school together. As they drew near the grounds both young men felt their hearts beating faster.

"I wonder if there's anything in for us?" whispered Dodge.

"Sure to be," responded Bayliss.

"Well, the fellows had better not try anything too frisky. If they do, they'll give us a chance to make trouble for 'em!"

It seemed as though the full count of the student body, boys and girls, had assembled in the yard this morning.

All was gay noise until the pair of cronies appeared at the gate.

Then, swiftly, all the noise died out.

One could hardly hear even a breath being drawn.

The silence was complete as Bert and Bayliss, now very white, stepped into the yard.

Though not a voice sounded, every eye was turned on the white-faced pair.

Bert Dodge's lips moved. He tried to summon up control enough of his tongue to utter some indifferent remark to his companion.

But the sound simply wouldn't come.

After a walk that was only a few yards in distance, yet seemed only less than a mile in length, the humiliated pair rushed up the steps, opened the great door and let themselves in.

At recess neither Bayliss nor Dodge had the courage to appear outside. As they left school that afternoon they were treated to the same dose of "silence."

Tuesday morning neither Dodge nor Bayliss showed up at all at school.

On Thursday morning High School readers of "The Blade" were greatly interested in the following personal paragraph:

"Bayliss and Dodge, both of the senior class, High School, have severed their connection with that institution. It is understood that the young men are going elsewhere in search of better educational facilities."

That was all, but it told the boys and girls at Gridley High School all that they needed to know.

"That is the very last gasp of the 'sorehead' movement," grinned Tom Reade, in talking it over with Dan Dalzell.

"Well, they did the whole trick for themselves," rejoined Dan. "No one else touched them, or pushed them. They took all the rope they wanted—and hanged themselves. Now, that pair will probably feel cheap every time

they have to come back to Gridley and walk the streets."

"All they had to do was to be decent fellows," mused Tom. "But the strain of decency proved to be too severe for them."

In the High School yard that Thursday morning there was one unending strain of rejoicing.

Some of the other late "soreheads," who had escaped the full meed of humiliation—Davis, Cassleigh, Fremont, Porter and others—actually sighed with relief when they found what they had escaped in the way of ridicule and contempt.

"The whole thing teaches us one principle," muttered Fremont to Porter.

"What is that?"

"Never tackle the popular idol in any mob. If you can't get along with him, avoid him—but don't try to buck him!"

"Humph!" retorted Porter. "If you mean Prescott and his gang—Dick & Co., as the fellows call them—I can follow one part of your advice by avoiding them. I never did and never could like that mucker Prescott!"

The fact of interest to Dick would have been that he appeared to enjoy the respect of at least ninety-five per cent. of the student body of the High School.

Surely that percentage of popularity is

enough for anyone. The fellow who enjoys it can get along without the approbation of a few "soreheads"!

CHAPTER XVIII

"PRIN." GETS IN THE PRACTICE

IF Dodge and Bayliss devoted any time to farewells among their late fellow-students before quitting Gridley the fact did not seem to leak out.

Yet despite the absence of two young men who considered themselves of such great importance the Gridley High School appeared to go on about the same as ever.

It was the season of football, and nearly all of the school's interest and enthusiasm seemed to spend itself in that direction. Coach Morton did all in his power to push the team on to perfection; the other teachers worked harder than ever to keep the interest of the students sufficiently on their studies. The girls, as well as the boys, suffered from the infection of the gridiron microbe.

Five more games with other High School teams were fought out, and now Gridley had an unbroken record of victories so far for the season.

Such a history can often be built up in the athletics of a High School, but it has to be a school attended by the cream of young manhood and having an abundance of public interest and enthusiasm behind it all.

Not at any time in the season did Coach Morton allow the training work to slacken. Regularly the entire squad turned out for field work. If the afternoon proved to be stormy, then four blasts on the city fire alarm, at either two o'clock or two-thirty, notified the young men that they were to report at the gym. instead. There, the work, though different, was just as severe. The result was that every youngster in the squad "reeked" with good condition all through the season.

It is in just this respect that many a High School eleven fails to "make really good." In a team where discipline is lax some of the fellows are sure to rebel at spending "all their time training." Where the coach exercises too limited authority, or when he is too "easy," the team's record is sure to suffer in consequence. Many a High School eleven comes out a tail-ender just because the coach is not strict enough, or cannot be. Many a team composed of naturally husky and ambitious boys fails on account of a light-weight coach. On the other hand, the best coach in the country can't make

a winning eleven out of fellows who won't work or be disciplined.

Coach Morton's authority was unbounded. After the team had been organized for the season it took action by the Athletics Committee of the Alumni Association to drop a man from the team. But coach and captain could drop the offender back to the "sub" seats and keep him there. Moreover, it was well known that Mr. Morton's recommendation that a certain young man be dropped was all the hint that the Athletics Committee needed.

Under failing health, or when duties prevented full attention to football training, a member of the team was allowed to resign. But an offending member couldn't resign. He was dropped, and in the eyes of the whole student body being dropped signified deep disgrace.

In five out of the won games Dick Prescott had played left end, and without accident. Yet, as it was wholly possible that he might be laid up at any instant, the coach was assiduously training Dan Dalzell and Tom Reade to play at either end of the line. Other subs were rigorously trained for other positions, but Dan and Tom were regarded as the very cream of the sub players in the light-weight positions.

Dan had played left end in one of the lesser games, and had shown himself a swift, brilliant

gridironist, though he was not quite as crafty as Prescott.

Tom Reade had less of strategy than Dan, but relied more upon great bursts of speed and in the sheer ability to run away from impending tackle.

Now the boys were training for the team's eighth game, the one to be played against the Hepburn Falls High School, a strong organization.

"Remember that a tie saves the record, but that it doesn't look as well as a winning," Coach Morton coaxed the squad dryly, as they started in for afternoon practice.

"We miss the mascot that the earlier High School teams used to have," remarked Hudson.

"Yes? What was it?" inquired coach.

"Why, bully old Dr. Thornton used to drop in for a few minutes, 'most every practice afternoon," replied Hudson. "I can remember just how his full, kindly old face, with the twinkling eyes, used to encourage the fellows up to the prettiest work that was in them. Oh, he was a mascot—Dr. Thornton was!"

Coach Morton was of the same mind, but he didn't say so, as it would sound like a reflection on the present unpopular principal, Abner Cantwell.

This afternoon there was no real team prac-

tice. Mr. Morton wanted certain individual play features brought out more strongly. One of these was the kicking of the ball.

After several had worked with the pigskin Mr. Morton called out:

"Now, Prescott, you take the ball, and drop back to the twenty-five-yard line. When you get there name your shot—that is, tell us where you intend to put the ball. Where doesn't matter as long as it is a long kick and a true one. After you name your shot, then run swiftly to the center of the field. From there, without a long pause, kick and see how straight you can drive for the point you have named."

"All right, sir," nodded Dick. Tucking the pigskin under his arm, he jogged back to the twenty-five-yard line.

"Right over there!" called Dick, pointing. "I'll try to drop the ball in the front row of seats, second section past the entrance."

"Very good, Prescott!"

No one was sitting in the section named by Prescott, but a few onlookers who had been squatting in a section near by hastily moved.

"The duffers! They needn't think I am going to hit them with the ball," muttered Dick. Then he started on a hard run.

Just at center he stopped abruptly, swung back his right foot and dropped the ball.

It was a hard, fast drive. The ball arched upward, somewhat, though it did not travel high.

But to Dick, standing still to watch the effect of his kick there came a sudden jolt. A man had just appeared, walking through the entrance passage. His head, well up above the sloping sides of the passage at this point, was not right in line with the ball.

And that man was Principal Cantwell!

Several members of the squad saw what might happen, but every one of them was too eagerly expectant to make a sound to prevent the threatened catastrophe.

Dick saw and half shivered. Yet in his desire to say something in the fewest words of warning, all he could think of was:

"Low bridge!"

Nor did Coach Morton succeed in thinking of anything more helpful, for he shouted only:

"Mr. Cantwell!"

"Eh?" asked the principal, turning toward the coach and therefore not seeing the ball that was now nearly upon him.

Mr. Cantwell, on this afternoon, having a few calls in mind, had arrayed himself in his best. He wore a long black frock coat which, he imagined, made him look at least as distinguished as a diplomat. In the matter of silk hats, being

decidedly economical, Mr. Cantwell allowed himself a new one only once in two years. But a new one had been due; he had just bought one, and now wore this glossy thing in the latest style.

There was no time for more warning.

The descending ball was in straight line with that elegant hat.

Bump! The pigskin struck the hat full and fair, carrying it from the principal's head.

On sailed hat and football for some three feet, the hat managing to run upside down.

R-r-r-rip! The force with which the football was traveling impaled the hat on a picket at the side of the stand. Then, as if satisfied with its work, the football struck and bounded back, landing at the principal's feet.

For one moment Mr. Cantwell was dumb with amazement.

Then he saw his impaled hat and realized the extent and tragedy of his loss. The angered man went white with wrath.

"What ruffian did that?" he roared.

But the boys, unable to hold in any longer, had let out a concerted though half-suppressed "whoop!" and now came running to the spot.

"Who kicked my hat off?" demanded the principal, pointing tragically to the piece of headgear, through the crown and past the rim

of which the picket now stood up as though in triumph.

"You—you got in the way of—the ball, sir," explained Drayne, trying hard to keep from roaring out with laughter.

"But some one kicked the ball my way," insisted the principal, with utter sternness. "Don't tell me that no one did! That football could not fly through the air without some one propelling it. Now, young gentlemen, who kicked that ball?"

"I did, Mr. Cantwell," admitted Dick, pushing his way through the throng. "And I'm very sorry that anything like this has happened, sir."

"Oh, you did it, eh?" demanded the principal, eyeing the young man witheringly. "And you actually expect an apology to restore my new and expensive hat to its former pristine condition of splendor?"

"I didn't know you were there, sir," Dick explained. "You didn't appear until just after I had kicked the ball."

"Prescott is quite right, Mr. Cantwell," put in Coach Morton. "None of us knew you were here in the passage until the ball had been kicked—not, in fact, until the ball was almost upon you."

"Then, when you saw me, why didn't you

call out to warn me?" demanded the principal, still fearfully angry, though trying to keep back unparliamentary language.

"I did call out, sir," replied Dick. "There was mighty little time to think, but I called out the two quickest words I could think of."

"What did you call?" demanded the principal.

"I yelled 'low bridge!'"

"A most idiotic expression," snorted the principal. "What on earth does it mean, anyway?"

"It means to duck, sir," Prescott answered.

"Duck?" retorted Mr. Cantwell, glaring suspiciously at the sober-faced young left end. "Now, what on earth does 'duck' mean, unless you refer to a web-footed species of poultry?"

"Prescott was rattled, beyond a doubt, Mr. Cantwell," interposed Coach Morton. "So was I—the time was so short. All I could think of was to call out to you by name."

"With the result that I looked your way—and lost my new hat," snapped the principal. He now turned to take the spoiled article off the paling. He looked at it almost in anguish, for he had been very proud of that glossy article.

"It's a shame," muttered Drayne, with mock sympathy.

"That's what it is," agreed Dave Darrin innocently. "But—Mr. Morton—I think the matter can be fixed satisfactorily. If you call this to the attention of the Athletics Committee won't they vote to appropriate the price of a new hat out of the High School athletics fund? You know, the fund is almost overburdened with money this year."

"That might not be a bad idea," broke in the principal eagerly. "Will you call this to the attention of the Committee, Mr. Morton? For it was in coming here to watch the young men that I lost my fine, new hat."

"Now, I'm heartily sorry," replied Mr. Morton, "but I am certain the members of the committee will feel that money contributed by the citizens of the town can hardly be expended in purchasing hats for anyone."

"But——" Mr. Cantwell began to expostulate. Then he stopped, very suddenly. Just as plainly as anyone else present the principal now saw the absurdity of expecting a new hat out of the athletics fund. Mr. Cantwell shot a very savage look at innocent-appearing Dave Darrin.

"My afternoon is spoiled, as well as my hat," remarked the principal, turning to leave with as much dignity as could be expected from a man who bore such a battered hat in his hands.

"The hatter might be able to block your hat out and repair it," suggested Hudson, though without any real intention of offering aid. "Our coachman had that sort of trick done to a played-out old silk hat that Dad gave him."

"Mr. Hudson," returned the principal, turning and glaring at this latest polite tormentor, "will you be good enough to remember that I am not extremely interested in your family history?"

"Back to your practice, men!" called the coach sharply, after the last had been seen of the back of the principal's black coat.

"It was too bad!" muttered Dick, in a tone of genuine regret.

"Say that again, and I'll make an effort to thrash you, Prescott!" challenged Hudson, with a grin.

"Well, I am sorry it happened," Dick insisted. "And mighty sorry, too."

"You couldn't help it."

"I know it, but that hardly lessens my regret. I don't enjoy the thought of having destroyed anyone else's property, even if I couldn't help it and can't be blamed."

"Prescott said he didn't know I was there!" exclaimed Mr. Cantwell angrily to himself. "Bosh! That boy has been a thorn in my side ever since I became principal of the school. Of

course he saw me—and he kicked wonderfully straight! Oh, how I wish I could make him wear this hat every day during the balance of the school year! Such a handsome hat—eight dollars!"

"It's a shame to tell you," confided Dave Darrin, as he and Dick headed the sextette of chums on the homeward tramp, "but you're certainly looking in great condition, old fellow."

"I feel simply perfect, physically," Dick replied. "I have, in fact, ever since I first began to train in the baseball squad last season. It's wonderful what training does for a fellow! I know there's a heap of bad condition in the world, but I often wonder why there is. Why, Dave, I ought to knock wood, of course, but I feel so fine that it seems as though nothing could put me out of form."

At that moment young Prescott had no idea how easily a few minutes could bring one from the best possible condition to the brink of physical despair.

CHAPTER XIX

LAURA AND BELLE HAVE A SECRET

"ONLY a team of fools would hope to stop Gridley High School this year."

Thus stated the Elliston "Tribune" after Gridley had walked through Elliston High School, one of the strongest school teams of the state, by a score of eight to nothing.

That copy of "The Tribune" found its way over to Gridley, and fell into the hands of some of the High School boys.

"Be careful, young men," warned Mr. Morton. "Don't get it too seriously into your heads that you can't be beaten, or your downfall will date from that hour. The true idea is not that you can't be beaten, but that you won't. Stick to the latter idea as well as you do to your training, and it will be a good eleven, indeed, that can get a game away from you."

"Only two more to play this year, anyway," replied Hudson. "We can't lose much."

"The team might lose two, and that would be a worse record than any Gridley eleven has made in five years," retorted Mr. Morton dryly.

"We won't lose 'em, though," rejoined Tom Reade. "Every fellow in the squad is in a

conspiracy to pull the eleven through the next two games—by its hair, if necessary."

"That line of thought is better than conceit," smiled the coach.

The game with Paunceboro High School came off, one of the most stubbornly fought battles that Gridley had ever entered. It seemed impossible to score against this enemy.

Again and again Dick broke around the left end in a spirited dash, or Dan Dalzell made one of his swift sorties at right end. Then, by the time that Paunceboro had grown used to end dashes, Gridley would make a smashing charge at center.

All these styles of attack, however, Paunceboro met smilingly. In the first half there was no score.

Yet Paunceboro did not succeed any better in getting through or around Gridley's line of flexible human steel. Until within ten minutes before the close of the second half, it looked like a tie between giants of the school gridiron.

Then, by a series of feints in which Prescott, Darrin, Drayne and Hudson bore off the most brilliant honors, although all under Wadleigh's planning, Paunceboro was sorely pressed down against its own goal line.

Just in the nick of time Paunceboro made a safety, and thus sent the ball back up the field.

But it cost Paunceboro two reluctantly-given points, and that was the score—two to nothing.

Gridley was still victor in every game so far played in the season. November was now far along, and there remained only the great Thanksgiving Day game. This contest, against Filmore High School, was to be fought out on the Gridley field.

"Your football season will soon be over, Dick," remarked Laura Bentley, one afternoon when Prescott and Darrin, on their way back from coach's gridiron grilling, met Laura and Belle on Main Street.

"This season will soon be over," replied Dick "but I hope for another next year."

"And then, perhaps, at college?" hinted Belle.

"If we go to college," replied Dick slowly.

"Why? Don't you expect to?" asked Laura, in some surprise.

"We are not sure," murmured Dick, "that we want to go to college."

"Why, I thought both of you were ambitious for higher education," cried Belle.

"So we are," nodded Dave.

"Oh! Then, if not to college, you are going to some scientific school?" guessed Laura.

"I wonder if you two could keep a secret?" laughed Dick teasingly.

"Try us!" challenged Belle Meade.

Dick glanced at Dave, who gave a barely perceptible nod.

"No; we won't try you," retorted Dick. "We'll trust you, without any promise on your part."

"Good!" cried Laura, in a gratified tone.

"Well?" inquired Belle, as neither boy spoke.

"It's just here, then," Prescott went on, in a low tone, after glancing around to make sure that no one else was within hearing. "The Congressman from this district, in a year or so more, will have the filling of a vacancy at West Point. That means a cadetship from this district. Now, a Congressman can appoint a cadet as a matter of favoritism, or to pay a political debt to some relative of the boy he so appoints. But the custom, in this district, has always been for the Congressman to appoint the boy who comes out best in a competitive examination. The examination is thrown open to all boys, of proper age, who can first pass a good physical examination."

"So you're both going to try for it?" asked Belle quickly.

"No," retorted Dave very quickly. "That would make us rivals. Dick and I don't want to be rivals."

"Then where do you come in?" asked Belle, glancing curiously at Darrin.

"Whisper!" replied Dave, looking mischievously mysterious. After a pause he continued, almost in a whisper:

"At just about the same time there will be a vacancy at Annapolis. So while Dick is trying to get a job carrying the banner for the Army, it will be little David trying for a chance to be a second Farragut in the Navy."

Dick winced at his chum's rather slighting allusion to an Army career, but on this one point of preference in the way of the service, tho two chums were willing to disagree. Darrin wouldn't have gone to West Point if he could. Dick admitted the greatness of the American Navy, but all his heart was set on the Army.

"Both of you boys, then, are planning to give up your lives to the Flag?" exclaimed Laura.

"Yes," nodded Dick; "do you think it's foolish?"

"I think it's glorious!" breathed Laura.

"So do I," agreed Belle heartily; "though, like Dave, I should think the Navy would be the more attractive."

"Oh, the Navy is all right," gibed Dick. "It would never suit me, though. You see, a fellow in the Navy has nothing to do but ride into a fight on board a first-class ship. It's too much

like being a Cook's tourist in war time. Now, any Army officer, or a private soldier, for that matter, has to depend upon his own physical exertions to get him into the fight."

"And an Army fellow," twitted Dave, "if he finds the fight too hard for him, can always dig a hole and hide in it. But where can a naval officer hide?"

"Oh, he has it easy enough, anyway, hiding behind armor plate," scoffed Dick.

"Of one thing I feel certain, anyway," said Laura thoughtfully. "You are both of you cut out for the military life. Under the most fearful conditions I don't believe either one of you would ever show the white feather."

"I don't know," replied Dick gravely. "Neither one of us has ever been tested sufficiently. But I hope you're right, Laura. I'd sooner be dead, at this instant, than to feel that my cowardice would ever throw the slightest stain on the grand old Flag. I try to be generous in my opinions of others. I think I can stand almost any man except—the coward!"

"I'm not a bit afraid of either one of you, on that score," broke in Belle warmly.

"That's very kind of you," nodded Dave. "But of course you don't know any more about our bravery than we do ourselves. It has never been proven."

"How many young men have been killed in football this year?" asked Laura quietly.

"I think the paper stated, the other day, that it was something more than forty," replied Dick.

"Well, don't you two play football?" demanded Laura. "Don't you both jump into the crush as fearlessly as anyone? Doesn't it take about as much nerve to play fast and furious football as it does to fight on the battlefield? Isn't football, in its hardest form, a great training for the soldier?"

"Oh, perhaps," laughed Dick. "For that matter, Laura, I believe you could soon talk me into believing that I'm braver than good old Phil Sheridan!"

"Hullo," muttered Dave suddenly. "What ——"

"Where's the crowd rushing?" demanded Belle, in the same breath.

"There's some trouble down the street!" cried Darrin. "And smoke, too."

"It's a fire!" cried Dick, wheeling about. "Come along—all!"

As the girls started to scurry down the street Dick caught Laura's nearer arm to aid her. Dave did as much for Belle.

These four young people were among the first hundred and fifty to gather on the sidewalk before a store and office building that was on fire.

It was a five story building. Fire had started in back on the second floor. Originating in offices empty at the time, the blaze had gained good headway ere it was discovered. It had eaten up to the third and fourth floors, and was now sweeping frontward. On the third floor the heat had cracked the window glass, and the air, rushing in, had fanned up a brisk blaze. Flames were beginning to shoot out their fiery tongues through these third story windows.

"Is everyone out of that building?" demanded the policeman on the beat, rushing up. He had just learned that a citizen had gone to ring in the fire alarm, so now the policeman's next thought was directed toward life saving.

There was a quick count of those who had been in the offices on the upper floors.

On the fourth floor one suite of offices had been occupied as a china painting school. Miss Trent, the teacher, who had reached the sidewalk safely, now looked about her anxiously.

"I had only one pupil up there, Miss Grace Dodge," replied Miss Trent, hurriedly. "I called to her and then ran. Miss Dodge started after me, then rushed back to get her purse, palette and color case."

"Has anyone seen Miss Dodge?" demanded the policeman.

No one had.

"Then I'll get up there, if I can," muttered the officer.

Dropping belt and club to the sidewalk, and pulling his helmet down tight on his head, the policeman darted into the building and up the stairs.

At that moment, above the smoke and flames pouring out of the third story windows, Grace Dodge appeared at one of the windows on the fourth floor. She was hatless, and a streak of blood appeared over her left temple.

"Don't jump!" shouted several men loudly. "A policeman has just started up to get you."

Miss Dodge appeared somewhat dazed; it was a question whether she understood. But her face disappeared from the window way. To many of the horrified ones below, it appeared as though the imperiled girl had swayed dizzily away from the window, as though overcome by the heat and fumes from the windows below her.

"Where is the fire department? Is it never coming?" wailed one woman in the throng, wringing her hands.

No one here knew that the citizen who had rushed to send in the alarm had found the first box out of order. He was now rushing to another alarm box.

Out of the hallway came the policeman, white-faced and tottering weakly.

"I—I couldn't get up much above the second floor," he gasped, in a voice out of which the strength was gone. "I—I guess the —heat and smoke got me! But—some one—must try!"

Where was that fire department?

Dick, staring over the crowd, found that all of his chums had arrived.

"Come on, fellows!" he yelled. "We've got to do something. Follow me!"

Prescott, after one swift glance at the buildings, made a dash for the door of the one just to the right of the blazing pile. Into the stairway entrance he dashed, followed by Dave Darrin, by Tom Reade, Greg Holmes, Dan Dalzell and Harry Hazelton.

"Hurrah!" yelled some one, in infectious enthusiasm. "Dick & Co. to the rescue!"

CHAPTER XX

IN THE LINE OF DARING

THAT became instantly the cry:

"Dick & Co. to the rescue!"

Yet none of the sextette heard it.

They were all inside, at the first step of their projected deed of bravery.

"All of you but Dave run through the offices!" yelled Dick. "Some of the tenants must have fire-rope coils. Grab the first rope you can find and bring it to me on the roof. Hustle! Dave, you follow me!"

Even to boys daily grilled on the football gridiron it was no mere matter of sport to dart up five flights of stairs at fast speed.

Dick Prescott was panting as he reached the roof and threw open the skylight door.

But he got out on the roof, hurrying across it, doing his best, at the same time, to gulp in chestfuls of fresh air.

Then he came to the edge of the roof next to the burning building.

The roof of that other building was about fifteen feet below the roof on which Dick Prescott stood.

After an instant of swift calculation young Prescott jumped.

He landed, below, on the balls of his feet, though the next instant the momentum of the fall carried him forward onto his hands.

In another twinkling Prescott was up, running toward the front edge of the building.

He stopped at the skylight door, but discovered that the flames and smoke below shut off hope there. So he continued to the front of the roof.

Here Dick glanced back, for a second, to make sure that Dave had followed safely.

Darrin was on his feet, and waved his hand reassuringly.

Then Dick Prescott leaned out, peering down at the front of the burning building.

"There's Prescott!" shouted some of the most enthusiastic watchers.

"Hurrah. Old Gridley High School!"

But Dick paid no heed to the crowd. He was trying to locate the window at which Grace Dodge had appeared, and was trying to contrive how he would use a rope when one came.

In the meantime Darrin, having jumped to the lower roof, remained where he had dropped, awaiting the arrival of the other fellows with a rope.

After a few moments they came. Reade had a coil of inch rope, which he waved enthusiastically.

"Wait until we get the rope uncoiled," called Greg. "Then we'll lower some of us down to join you."

"Lower—nothing! Jump!" yelled Dave, in a stentorian quarter-deck voice.

Greg obeyed, instanter. Tom flung the coil of rope below, then followed it. Hazelton and Dalzell, an instant later, were with their comrades.

"Come on, now," ordered Darrin, who had snatched up the coil of rope and was darting over the roof. "Dick's waiting for us."

Prescott, still looking below, heard the swish of ropes on the roof as Dave uncoiled and threw the lengths out.

"Good!" yelled Dick, looking back. "Tom, you take a turn or two of the rope around that chimney, for anchor. Dave, you stand here at the roof edge to pay out the rope. Greg, you and Dan get in behind Dave to help on the hoist. See, Dave! That third window from the end—there's where the rope wants to go."

"You going down the rope?" queried Darrin dryly.

"Yes."

"Wait, then, and I'll tie some knots in it."

"No time for that," vetoed Dick sharply. "I'll have to take my chances. Miss Dodge may be smothering, or burning. Pay it out—fast!"

Dick watched until he saw that the rope had gone low enough, and that it hung before the right window.

"Now, brace yourselves, fellows!" he called, between his hands, for the roar of the flames and the crackling of timbers made some sort of trumpet necessary, even at short range.

On his knees, his back to the street, at the edge of the roof, Dick Prescott seized the rope.

Then, with a fervent inward prayer, he started over the edge, and hung in the air, eighty feet from the ground.

Down below, the ever-increasing crowd let out a cyclonic, roaring cheer. It was a foolish thing to do, for it might have rattled the young football player. But Prescott paid no attention to the racket, and kept on lowering himself, coolly.

Here was where his gym. training and all his football practice came in splendidly. Every muscle was strong, every nerve true to its duty!

Not once did Prescott fear that he would lose his grip and fall to the street below.

Up above, at the roof's edge, stood Darrin, directing as though from quarter-deck or military-top. Dave had to lean rather far out, at that great height, but it did not make him dizzy.

"There! The grand old chap has landed on the window-sill! He has gone inside!" cried Dave, turning to his comrades. "Now we can wait until we feel a signal-pull on the rope."

As he turned away from the smoke that was coming up through the air Darrin realized how much smoke he had inhaled. He thumped his chest lightly, taking deep breaths.

Dick was in the studio now.

Close to the window, where the draught was strongest, Prescott found the smoke so thick that he had to grope his way through it; but bending

low, he quickly came to where Grace Dodge lay unconscious on the floor.

She looked lifeless, as she lay there.

"Whew! I'm afraid she's a goner, already!" thought Dick, with a great surge of compassion.

However, seizing the unconscious girl by the shoulders he dragged her swiftly over the floor to the window through which he had come.

The rope still dangled there.

Seizing it, Dick gave it a gentle pull—not too hard, for fear the jerk might catch good old Dave off his guard and yank him over the roof's edge.

In another instant Darrin was "back on the job," peering down.

Dick made a signal that Dave understood perfectly.

Prescott's next care was to knot his end of the rope swiftly around Grace's body, above the waist, adjusting the coils so that considerable of the strain would come under the shoulders, where it could best be borne.

Once more Dick leaned out of the window, making motions. Dave Darrin nodded. The fascinated crowd in the street looked up, breathless. Few now even thought to wonder why the fire department did not appear.

At Dave's command the others on the roof with him began to hoist. Slowly, Dick aided

Grace's body through the window. Then the girl, motionless, so far as she herself was concerned, swung in the air, slowly ascending.

Now groans of horror went up from the street. It seemed to the onlookers below as though a dead body were being hoisted.

Dick had made a loose hitch of the end of the rope so that it bound the girl's skirt about her ankles.

As he watched, he saw the swinging body steady at the roof edge. Then Grace disappeared from his sight as Dave and the others hauled her to momentary safety.

"Ugh!" gasped young Prescott. The smoke and the hot air, filling his lungs, drove him back from the open window to a spot where the draught was less intense.

After a few moments he heard something clattering against the window frame.

"What is it?" wondered Dick, dreamily, for his senses were leaving him.

Rousing himself, by a supreme effort of the will, the young football player staggered toward the window. It was the rope, which Dave had lowered for him. And thoughtful Darrin had swiftly knotted a strong slip-noose at the end.

Dick had just strength and consciousness enough left to slip this noose over his head and

Dick Rescues Grace Dodge.

down under his armpits, drawing the noose tight. Then—so fast was the hot air and smoke overcoming him that he had to fight for it!—Dick forced his way to the sill and gave a hard tug at the rope. Then he reeled, falling back senseless upon the floor.

In that same instant, not far behind him, the flames burst through the flooring.

There must be some quick work, now, or Dick Presscott would meet a hero's death at seventeen!

CHAPTER XXI

THE PRICE OF BRAVERY

DAVE DARRIN did not falter in his duty for an instant.

He had been waiting for that tug on the rope.

Now he leaned out, and as far over as was possible without pitching himself headlong into the street below.

"Dick! Oh, Dick!" he roared.

There was, of course, no answer, for young Prescott lay senseless on the floor, smoke and hot air filling his lungs, the creeping flames threatening to pounce upon and devour him.

Wondering, Dave gave a slight signal tug himself at the rope.

From below there was no answer.

"Something uncanny has happened, down there!" muttered Darrin.

"What's wrong?" called Reade.

"I wish I knew," muttered Dave. "There is no further signaling."

"Then——"

That was as far as Tom got with his hint at an explanation.

"Cut it," retorted Darrin briskly. "Keep the rope steady. I'm going down there."

"Can you——"

"Yes!" blazed Dave recklessly. "Watch me. Here goes nothing!"

As the last three words left his lips Darrin swung free over the roof edge.

He was going down the straining, smooth rope now, hand under hand.

The dense crowd in the street below was quick to realize that something new and tragic was on the cards.

A gasp of suspense went up as Dave slowly went down.

Many in the street uttered a silent prayer—for heroes are ever dear to the multitude.

Dave's task now was more dangerous than Dick's original undertaking had been.

The smoke was rolling up with ever increasing density.

"I'll close one eye, and save that to see Dick with," Darrin muttered grimly to himself.

So, with one eye closed tightly, Dave yet knew when the instant came to swing in and stand on the sill.

Opening the closed eye, Darrin sought to peer into the studio.

Such a gust of smoke came out at him that Darrin very nearly lost his balance from dizziness.

"I can't see a blessed thing in there," Dave muttered. So he sprang inside.

Now, quickly enough Dave stumbled over the prostrate figure of his unconscious comrade.

Fairly pouncing upon Prescott, Dave half raised that body, then dragged it to the window.

"Pull!" Darrin yelled up to Tom Reade, peering over the roof's edge.

Over the roar of the fire Dave's voice did not carry well, but his gesture was seen.

Reade gave the command, and the hoisting commenced, while Dave, standing at his post, though choking, and his brain reeling, swung Dick's feet clear of the sill.

Then the body began to go up quickly, while the crowd watched in greater awe than ever.

Dave Darrin leaped out upon the sill, holding a handkerchief over his mouth and nostrils

in order to protect his lungs as much as possible.

With the other hand Dave clutched at the window frame, for he had a fearful dread, now, that he would lose his hold, his footing and plunge headlong into the street.

Dick's body disappeared over the roof edge.

After what seemed like a short age, but what was only a few moments, Reade again showed his face, dangling the noose in his hand.

Then he let it fall until it hung close to Darrin.

Reade and the crowd alike watched breathlessly, while Dave Darrin, fumbling, almost blindly, tried to slip the noose over his head and adjust it under his shoulders.

Once he let go of the rope, half swaying out into the street.

A cry of terror went up from the spectators below.

Tom Reade carefully swung the rope back again. Dave caught it. After it had seemed as though he must fail Dave at last adjusted the noose under his armpits.

"All right?" bellowed Tom Reade, making a trumpet of his hands.

Darrin answered only by a tug on the rope. Then he hung in mid air as the hoisting began.

At that moment a new sound came on the

air. The fire department, with a short circuit somewhere in its wires, had at last been notified by telephone, and the box number was pealing out on two church bells.

Barely were Dave's feet clear of the top of the window casing when a draught drove the flames out.

His shoes were almost licked by the red tongues.

"Hurry, you hoisters!" bellowed a man in the street.

His voice did not carry, but Tom Reade and his wearied helpers were doing all that could be done by strong, willing hands.

Another and longer tongue of flame leaped out through the shattered window, and again Dave's swinging feet were all but bathed in fire.

"Thank heaven we've got you up here, old fellow!" panted Tom Reade fervently, as Dave was hauled over the roof's edge, helping himself a little.

Dave, as soon as the noose had been slipped over his head, got up on his feet, though he staggered a bit dizzily.

"We must all get back up to that roof," ordered Dave, pointing to the roof down from which they had leaped a while before.

"We can't," retorted Reade. "We'll have to wait for the firemen and their ladders."

"Ladders—nothing!" retorted Dave, though his voice was weak and husky. "We'll make our own ladders. You, Holmes, get over against that wall. Hazelton, you beside him. Reade, you climb up onto their shoulders. Now, Dan you climb up on Reade's shoulders, and you'll reach that roof up there!"

Darrin's orders were quickly carried out. This trick of wall scaling was really not difficult for football men in daily practice. Dan's head was quickly above the gutter of the next roof. He pulled himself over the edge.

"Stand by to catch the rope, Dan," shouted Dave. "Throw it to him, Tom."

Whizz-zz! whirr-rr! That rope was over the edge and in Dan's hands. Dalzell raced to a chimney, taking two or three turns around and making fast.

"Come on!" he called down.

Harry Hazelton ascended the rope hand over hand, Reade following. Then Greg Holmes went up.

Dave, in the meantime, was preparing the apparently lifeless Grace Dodge for the ascent. As he gave the signal those on the roof above hauled away.

Grace was soon in a position of safety.

Then Dick, who had not, as yet, revived, was hoisted.

"Now, we'll haul you up," called down Reade.

"Forget it," mocked Darrin. "Toss down the rope and I'll use my own muscles."

So Dave joined them and stood beside them on the roof.

"Now, we'd better make the street as soon as we can," Darrin advised. "The one who's strongest pick up Miss Dodge, and another stand by for relief. Two of you will have to tote Dick. I wish I could help, but I'm afraid my strength is 'most all out.

Dave, however, led the way. By the time that the little party had descended two flights they were met by firemen rushing up. After that the task of reaching the street was easy.

As the rescuers and rescued came out upon the street the crowd, now driven back beyond police lines, started to cheer.

But Dave's hand, held up, acted as a silencer. Dick and Miss Dodge were carried to a neighboring drug store for attention.

Now the firemen tried to run up ladders to the studio floor, with a view to fighting the flames by turning the stream on through the windows. Flames drove them back. The onlookers were quick to grasp the fact that had no one acted before the arrival of the firemen, Grace Dodge would have been lost indeed. As

it was, the fire fighters were obliged to fight the fire from the roof of the next building.

The office building in which the flames had started was almost gutted before the blaze was subdued.

An hour later Grace Dodge was placed in an automobile and carried to her home, a physician accompanying her.

She had revived for a brief period, but had again sunk into unconsciousness. Whether her life could be saved was a matter of the gravest doubt.

And Dick?

Young Prescott was revived soon enough, after expert assistance had been secured.

Yet he had swallowed more of the overheated air than had the girl.

In the minds of the medical men there was a grave doubt as to whether his lungs could be fully restored—or whether he would be doomed to a spell of severe lung trouble, ending, most likely, in death at a later day!

Scores of people turned back from that fire with tears in their eyes.

They had seen this day something that they would remember all their lives.

"Dick and Dave were wondering whether they had courage enough for the military service," sobbed Laura Bentley, in the privacy of

Belle's room. "They have courage enough for anything!"

Dick was up and about the next day, though he did not go to school.

Moreover, later reports placed him out of serious danger. The football squad was gloomy enough, however. Their star left end man would not be in shape for the big Thanksgiving Day game.

CHAPTER XXII

THE THANKSGIVING DAY GAME

"SAY, you're a great one, Prescott, to throw us down in this way," chaffed Drayne, as Dick strolled into dressing quarters.

"Oh, come, now!" broke in Darrin impatiently. "It's bad enough, Drayne, to have to play side partner to you in the biggest game in the year, without having to listen to your fat-headed criticsm of better men."

Drayne flushed, and might have retorted, had not Wadleigh broken in, in measured tones, yet with much significance in his voice:

"Yes, Drayne; cut out all remarks until you've made good. Of course you are going to make good, but talk will sound better after deeds."

Most of the fellows who were togging were uneasy.

They wanted, with all their hearts, to win this day's game. First of all, the game was needed in order to preserve their record for unbroken victories. Then again, Filmore High School was a team worth beating at any time, and Filmore boosters had been making free remarks about a Gridley Waterloo.

So there was a feeling of general depression in dressing quarters.

Dick Prescott, with his dashing, crafty, splendid, score-making work at left end, had become a necessity to the Gridley eleven.

"It's the toughest luck that ever happened," grumbled Hazelton, right guard, to Holmes, right tackle. "And I don't believe Drayne is in anything like condition, either."

"Now, see here, you two," broke in Captain Wadleigh behind them, as he gripped an arm of either boy, "no croaking. We can't afford it."

"We can't afford anything," grinned Hazelton uneasily.

"Oh, of course, we're going to win to-day—Gridley simply has to win," added Holmes hastily.

"Yes; you two look as though you had the winning streak on," growled Wadleigh, in a

low voice. "For goodness' sake come out of your daze!"

"Do you think yourself that Drayne is fit?" demanded Hazelton.

"He's the fittest man we have that can play left end," retorted Wadleigh.

"Knocking, are you?" demanded Drayne, coming up behind them. "Nice fellows you are!"

"Oh, now, see here, Drayne, no bad blood," urged Wadleigh. He spoke authoritatively, yet coaxingly, too. "Remember, we've got to keep all our energies for one thing to-day."

"Well, I'm mighty glad you two don't play on my end of the line," sneered Drayne, looking at Hazelton and Holmes with undisguised hostility.

"Cut it, Drayne. And don't you two talk back, either," warned Wadleigh sternly.

"Oh, acknowledge the corn, Drayne," broke in Hudson, with what he meant for good humor. "Just say you're no good and let it go at that."

There was a dead silence, for an instant, broken by one unidentified fellow, muttering in a voice that sounded like a roar in the silence:

"Drayne? Humph!"

"There you go! That's what all of you are saying to yourselves!" cried Drayne angrily. "For some reason you idiots seem to think I'm

in no shape to-day. Hang it, I'm sorry I agreed to play. For two cents I wouldn't play."

"Drayne can be bought off cheaply, can't he?" remarked one of the fellows.

The last speaker did not intend that his voice should reach Drayne, but it did.

"Say, you fellows all have a grouch on, just because I'm playing to-day!" quivered the victim of the remarks. "Oh, well, never mind! I'll cure your grouch, then!"

Seating himself on a locker box, Drayne began to unfasten the lacings of his shoes.

"Here, man! What are you doing?" demanded Captain Wadleigh, bounding forward angrily.

"Curing the grouch of this bunch," retorted Drayne sulkily.

"Man alive, there's no time to fool with your shoes now!" warned the team captain.

"I'm not going to need this pair," Drayne rejoined. "Street shoes will do for me to-day."

"Not on the gridiron!"

"I'm not going on the field. I've heard enough knocking," grumbled Drayne.

A dozen of the fellows crowded about, consternation written in their faces.

Prescott was known not to be fit to play. Only the day before Dr. Bentley had refused to pass him for the game. Hence Drayne, even

if a trifle out of condition, was still the best available man for left end.

"Quit your fooling, Drayne!" cried two or three at once.

"Quit your talking," retorted Drayne, kicking off his other field shoe. "I've done all my talking."

Truth to tell, Drayne still intended to play, but he wanted to teach these fellows a lesson. He intended to make them beg, from Wadleigh down, before he would go on to the finish of his togging. Drayne knew when he had the advantage of them.

"Don't be a fool, Drayne," broke in Hudson hotly.

"Or a traitor to your school," added another.

"Be a man!"

In Drayne's present frame of mind all these appeals served to fan his inward fury.

"Shut up, all of you!" he snapped. "I've listened to all the roasting I intend to stand. I'm out of the game!"

Several looked blankly at "Hen" Wadleigh.

"Whom have you to put in his place?" Grayson demanded hoarsely.

Drayne heard and it was balm to his soul. He started to pull off his football trousers.

Outside, the band started upon a lively galop. The crowd began to cheer. It started in as a

Gridley cheer. Then, above everything else, rang the Filmore yell of defiance.

Just at this moment Coach Morton strode into the room. Almost in a twinkling he learned of the new complication that had arisen.

"Captain Wadleigh, who is to play in Drayne's stead?" demanded the coach rather briskly.

"Under certain conditions," broke in Drayne, "I'll agree to play."

"We wouldn't have you under all the conditions in the world!" retorted Mr. Morton. "A football eleven must be an organization of the finest discipline!"

Drayne reddened, then went deathly white. He hadn't intended to let the matter go this far.

"Who is your best man for left end, captain?" insisted Mr. Morton. "You've got to decide like a flash. Your men ought to be out in the air now."

There was a blank pause, while "Hen" Wadleigh looked around over his subs.

"Will you let me play?"

There was a start. Every fellow in the room turned around to stare at the speaker.

It was Dick Prescott, who started eagerly forward, his face aglow with eagerness.

"You, Prescott?" cried Mr. Morton. "But

only yesterday Dr. Bentley reported that your lungs had not sufficiently recovered."

"I know, sir," Dick laughed coolly; "but that was yesterday."

"It would be foolhardy, my boy. If you went out on the field, and any exceptional strain came up, you might do an injury to your lungs."

"Mr. Morton," replied the team's left end, very quietly, "I'm willing to go out on the field—and do all that's in me, for old Gridley —if it's the last act of my life."

"Your hand, Prescott!" cried Mr. Morton, gripping the boy's palm. "That's the right spirit of grit and loyalty. But it wouldn't be right to let you do it. It isn't necessary, or human, to pay a life for a game."

"Will you let me go on the field if Dr. Bentley passes me *to-day?*" queried Prescott.

"But he won't."

"Try him."

Mr. Morton nodded, and some one ran out and passed the word for Dr. Bentley, who acted as medical director in the School's athletics.

Within two minutes the physician entered dressing quarters.

Coach Morton stated Prescott's request.

"Absurd," declared Dr. Bentley.

"Will you examine me, sir?" insisted Prescott.

With a sigh the old physician opened his satchel, taking out a stethoscope and some other instruments.

"Strip to the waist," he ordered tersely.

Many eager hands stretched out to aid Dick in his task.

In a few moments the young athlete, the upper half of his body bared, stood before the medical examiner. For his height, weight and age Prescott was surely a fine picture of physical strength.

But Dr. Bentley, with the air and the preformed bias of a professional sceptic, went all over the boy's torso, starting with a prolonged examination of the heart action and its sounds.

"You find the arterial pressure steady and sound, don't you?" asked Dick Prescott.

"Hm!" muttered Dr. Bentley. "Now, take a full breath and hold it."

Thump! thump! thump! went the doctor's forefinger against the back of his other hand, as he explored all the regions of Dick's chest.

A dozen more tests followed.

"What do you think, Doctor?" asked Mr. Morton.

"Hm! The young man recovers with great rapidity. If he goes into a mild game he'll stand it all right. If it turns out to be a rough game——"

"Then I'll fare as badly as the rest, won't I, Doctor?" laughed Dick. "Thank you for passing me, sir. I'll get into my togs at once."

"But I haven't said that I passed you."

Dick, however, feigned not to hear this. He was rushing to his locker, from which he began to haul the various parts of his rig.

"Is it a crime to let young Prescott go on the field?" asked Coach Morton anxiously.

"No," replied Dr. Bentley hesitatingly. "It might be a greater crime to keep him off the gridiron to-day. Men have been known to die of grief."

Probably a football player never had more assistance in togging up for a game. Those who couldn't get in close enough to help Dick dress growled at the others for keeping them out.

"You seem uneasy, Coach," murmured Captain Wadleigh, aside.

"I am."

"I can't believe, sir, that a careful man like Dr. Bentley would let Prescott go on at left end to-day, if there was good reason why Prescott shouldn't. As we know, from the past, Dick Prescott has wonderful powers of recuperation."

"If Prescott should go to pieces, Captain, whom will you put forward in his place?"

"Dalzell, sir. He's speedy, even if not as clever as Prescott or Drayne."

"I'm glad you've been looking ahead, Captain. But I hope Prescott will hold out, and suffer no injury whatever from this day's work."

Was Dick anxious? Not the least in the world. He was care free—jubilant. The Gridley spirit possessed him. He was going to hold out, and the eleven was going to win its game. That was all there was to it, or all there could be.

In the first two or three days after his injury at the fire Dick had traveled briefly in the dark valley of physical despair.

To be crippled or ill, to be physically useless —the thought filled him with horror.

Then young Prescott had taken a good grip on himself. Out of despair proceeded determination not to allow his lungs to go down before the assault of smoke and furnace-like air.

Grace Dodge was not, as yet, well on the way to recovery, but Dick Prescott, with his strong will power, and the grit that came of Gridley athletics, was now togging hastily to play in the great game—though he had not, as yet, returned to school after his disaster.

Out near the grandstand the band crashed forth for the tenth time. Gridley High School

bannerets waved by the hundreds. Yet Filmore, too, had her hosts of boosters here to-day, and their yells all but drowned out the spirited music.

"Here come our boys! Gridley! Gridley! Gridley! Wow-ow-ow!"

"Hurrah!"

Then the home boosters, who had read Drayne's name on the score card took another look at their cards—next rubbed their eyes.

"Prescott at left end!" yelled one frenzied booster. "Whoop!"

Then the Gridley bannerets waved like a surging sea of color. The band, finishing its strain, started in again, not waiting for breath.

"Prescott, after all, on left end!"

Home boosters were still cheering wildly by the time that Captain Pike, of Filmore High School, had won the toss and the teams were lining up.

Silence did not fall until just the instant before the ball was put in play.

Drayne, with his headgear pulled down over his eyes, and skulking out beside the grand stand, soon began to feel a savage satisfaction.

Something must be ailing the left end man after all, for Dick did not seem able to get through the Filmore line with his usual brilliant tactics.

Instead, after ten minutes of furious play, Filmore forced Gridley to make a safety. Then again the ball was forced down toward Gridley's goal line, and at last pushed over.

Gridley hearts, over on the grand stand and bleacher seats, were beating with painful rapidity. What ailed the home boys? Or were the Filmore youths, as they themselves fondly imagined, the gridiron stars of the school world? Filmore, like Gridley, had a record of no defeats so far this season.

It was a hard pill for Captain Wadleigh and his men to swallow.

In the interval between the halves the local band played, but the former dash was now noticeably absent from its music.

The Gridley colors drooped.

CHAPTER XXIII

SULKER AND REAL MAN

DAVE DARRIN glanced covertly, though anxiously, at his chum.

Was Dick really unfit to play? Dave wondered.

It was not that Prescott had actually failed in any quick bit of individual or team play that he had been signaled to perform. But

Darrin wondered if Dick could really be anything like up to the mark.

During the interval Captain Wadleigh went quietly among his men, murmuring a word of counsel here and there.

Nothing in Wadleigh's face or tone betrayed worry; intense earnestness alone was stamped on his bearing.

"Now, remember, fellows, don't get a spirit of defense grafted on you," were Wadleigh's last words before the second half began. "Remember, its to be a general assault all the time. If you get on the defensive nothing can save us from losing."

No sooner was the ball in motion than Gridley's line bore down upon the enemy. So determined was the assault that Filmore found itself obliged to give ground, stubbornly, for a while. Yet Captain Pike's men were not made of stuff that is easily whipped. After the first five minutes Pike's men got the ball and began to drive it a few yards, and then a few yards more, over into Gridley's territory.

As the minutes slipped by the ball went nearer and nearer to Gridley's goal line. Another touchdown must soon result.

Twice Pike tried to throw the ball around the left end. Wadleigh, Hudson, Darrin and Prescott, backed by quarter and left half, presented

such a stubborn block that the ball did not get another yard down the field in two plays. But Pike, who was a hammerer, made a third attempt around that left end. This time he gained but two feet, and the ball passed to Gridley.

Of course, after having had its left wing so badly battered Gridley was bound to try to work the ball through Filmore's right. As Wadleigh's signals crisped out, the Gridley players threw themselves out for a play to right.

Quarter received the ball, starting fiercely to the right. Left half dashed past quarter, receiving the ball and carrying it straight to Dick Prescott. For a moment this blind succeeded so admirably, that even those on the grand stand did not see the ball given to Prescott, but believed that quarter was rushing the ball over to the right.

Then, like a flash, the trick dawned.

Dick Prescott had the oval, and was running with it like a whirlwind, with Darrin and Hudson as his interference, and with quarter dashing close behind them.

Dick sprinted around the first Filmore man, leaving his interference to sweep the fellows over.

At Filmore's second attempt to tackle, Dick ducked low and escaped. In the next instant

the would-be tackler was bowled over by Darrin and Hudson, and Dick swept on with the ball.

By this time all the home boosters were on their feet, yelling like so many Comanches.

Filmore's half and full contrived a trap that caught young Prescott, and carried him down with the ball—but this happened at Filmore's forty-five-yard line!

In the next play, Dave had the ball, on a short pass, but with Dick dashing along close to his side, and Hudson on the other flank. Before Darrin went down on the ball it had been carried to Filmore's thirty-yard line. Then it went beyond the twenty-five-yard line, and Gridley still carried the pigskin.

"Dick's coming up, all right," proudly muttered Darrin to Hudson, while the next snap-back was forming.

"It's putting nerve into all of us," rejoined Hudson.

The pigskin was only fourteen yards from the Filmore goal line when Captain Wadleigh's men had to see the ball go to Filmore. Pike's men, however, failed to make good on downs, so the oval came back into Wadleigh's possession.

Now, the play was swift and brilliant. Dick got the ball around the left end once, and after-

wards assisted Dave to put it through the hostile line. With the third play Dick carried the pigskin barely across Filmore's goal line and scored a touchdown. Darrin immediately after made a kick for goal.

The score now stood eight to six for Filmore—but only ten minutes of playing time remained.

"Our fellows have saved a whitewash, and that's all," reflected Drayne. "They'd have done better with me, and I guess Wadleigh knows it by this time."

"Slug's the word," Pike passed around, swiftly. "No fouling, but use your weight, dash and speed. Slam these Gridley rubes. Hammer 'em!"

"Come on, now, Gridley!" rang the imploring request from the home boosters, who were now too restless to keep to their seats.

"Remember your record so far this season!"

"Forceful playing, but keep cool. Use your judgment to the last, and put a lot of speed and doggedness behind your science," was Wadleigh's adjuration.

Those who followed form most closely now had their eyes on young Prescott.

If he went to pieces that would leave Gridley weak at what had usually been its strongest point, especially in attack.

And Gridley had the ball again. But what

ailed Captain Wadleigh, the boosters wondered. For he was now sending the ball to the right wing, as if admitting that Prescott must not be worked too hard.

"Use Prescott!" shouted one man hoarsely. "Prescott! Prescott!"

"Yah! Dot's all right. Vot you t'ink Wadleigh has ein head for? Leafe him und Bresgott alone, and dey hand you der game a minute in!" bawled the deep bass voice of Herr Schimmelpodt who, nearly alone of the Gridley boosters, believed that the home team needed no grand stand coaching.

"But they've only eight minutes left," grumbled the man sitting to the left of Herr Schimmelpodt.

"Yah! Dot's all right, too," retorted the German. "Battles haf been won in less than eight minutes. Read history!"

In two plays Captain Wadleigh had succeeded in advancing the pigskin less than two yards down the Filmore territory.

But now hats were thrown up in the air, and frantic yells resounded when it was discovered that Dick had the ball again, and that Darrin, Hudson, Wadleigh, quarter and left half were fighting valiantly to push him through the stubborn, panting line of Filmore High School.

It was a splendid fight, but a losing one. Fil-

more was massing all its weight, wind and brawn, and Gridley lost the ball on downs.

An involuntary groan went up from the Gridley spectators.

Five and a half minutes left, and the ball in the enemy's hands! That settled the game.

The musicians looked at their leader, before taking the music from their instrument racks.

"Keep your music on," called the leader. "We of Gridley are sportsmen enough to play the victors off the field."

The play was quicker and snappier than ever. All the young men on both sides were using their last reserves of strength and wind. Pike was making a ferocious effort to get the ball back and over Gridley's goal line.

But Pike lost, after three plays, and Wadleigh's men again grabbed the pigskin.

"Barely two minutes!" groaned the Gridley spectators, watches in hand.

Dick was seen glancing at Wadleigh and shaking his head almost imperceptibly. But a hundred people on the grand stand saw that tiny shake, and, most of all, Pike took it in.

Wadleigh, before bending low over the ball held up thumb and forefinger of his right hand, formed in a circle, for a brief instant. That sign meant:

"Emergency signal code!"

Then he bent over to snap the ball back, and the figures that shot from quarter-back's chest carried different values from those that any enemy could guess.

"Eight—eleven—four—ten!"

Then the ball went back to quarter, who started from a crouch without straightening up.

Gridley's whole attack seemed to swing to the right. Wadleigh, himself, from half-facing to right, took a long step toward right wing; then wheeled like a flash, and went plowing, onward, to the left.

Quarter, after the start, and ere Filmore could break through, had passed the ball to half, who, on a wild sprint, had passed it to Dick Prescott.

And now Dick was racing out around Filmore's right end, backed by a crushing interference of which Wadleigh was the center. Hudson, with head low, was charging like a goat. Darrin, with head high, was watching for every chance at legitimate interference. Behind them all, quarter and left half pounded and pushed.

An instant and Dick was free and around Filmore's end. Now, he dashed into the race of his life!

Wadleigh sent a man sprawling. Dave's elbow did something to Filmore's right tackle. Just what it was none of the spectators could

see. But none of the field officials interfered, so it must have been legitimate.

After a fight and a short, brilliant run, Dick was tackled by Filmore's fullback.

One quivering instant—then Wadleigh and Hudson bumped that fullback so hard that he went down, Dick wriggling safely away and bounding toward Filmore's goal.

With fire in their eyes, Gridley's center and left wing swept on.

Dick Prescott was over the goal line, bending and holding the ball down! Then, indeed, the crowd broke loose—all except the few hundreds from Filmore.

Was it a touchdown? That was the question that all asked themselves. It was so close to the line that many onlookers were in doubt, and stood staring with all their eyes.

But the ball went back for the kick, and that settled all doubts.

Dave made the kick, and lost it—but who cared?

A moment later and the whistle blew—the second half was over—the game finished.

Filmore had bitten the dust to the song of eleven to eight.

Dick's tiny head shake had been a piece of strategy prearranged with Wadleigh. It was a legitimate ruse, as honest as any other piece

of football strategy intended to throw the enemy "off."

Now the band was indeed thundering out, playing in its best strain.

All restraint thrown aside, the spectators surged over the lines and out on the gridiron, making a rush for the heated but happy home players.

The record had been kept—a season without a game lost. Filmore swallowed its chagrin and went home.

Dick? He had helped nobly to save the game and the record, but now he was exhausted.

Over in dressing quarters two of the subs were rubbing him down, while Dr. Bentley and Coach Morton stood anxiously by.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

AFTER a few days Prescott was back at school. It was noted, however, that he did not take any part in gym. work, and that he spoke even more quietly than usual, but he kept up in his recitations.

Youth is the period of quick recovery. That the Thanksgiving Day game had strained the young left end there was no doubt. Within a

fortnight, however, Prescott was himself again, taking his gym. work, and a cross-country run three times a week.

"We ought to give Drayne the school cut," hinted Grayson. "He behaved in an abominable way right at the beginning of the critical game. He's a traitor."

"Give Drayne the cut?" repeated Wadleigh, slowly, before a group of the fellows. "Perhaps, in one way, he deserved it, but——"

"Well, what can you find to say for a fellow who acted like that?" demanded Hudson, impatiently.

"Drayne helped to win the game for us," replied Wadleigh moderately. "Had he played Filmore would have downed us—of that I'm sure, as I look back. Drayne's conduct put Prescott on the gridiron, didn't it? That was what saved the score for us."

At the time of Grace Dodge's great peril, her banker father had been away on a business trip. It was two days later when word was finally gotten to the startled parent. Then, by wire, Theodore Dodge learned that Grace's condition was all right, needing only care and time. So he did not hasten back on that account.

When he did return to Gridley, Mr. Dodge hunted up Lawyer Ripley.

"I must reward those boys, and hand-

somely," he explained to the lawyer. "Their splendid conduct demands it."

"I am sorry, Dodge, that you have been so long in coming to such a conclusion," replied the lawyer, almost coldly.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you still owe Prescott and Darrin that thousand dollars offered by your family as a reward for finding you when your misfortune happened."

"But my son, Bert——"

"Is the bitter enemy of young Prescott, who is one of the manliest young fellows ever reared in Gridley."

"But my wife has also opposed my paying the reward," argued Mr. Dodge. "She declares that the two boys were out on a jaunt and just stumbled upon me."

"Your wife, like all good mothers, is much inclined to take the part of her own son," rejoined Lawyer Ripley. "However, at the time Prescott and Darrin found you, they were not out on a jaunt. They were serving 'The Blade,' and I happen to know that the young men did some remarkably good detective work in trailing and rescuing you. They started fair and even with the police, but they beat the police at the latter's own game. Dodge, by every consideration of right and justice, you owe that

reward to Prescott and Darrin! If they had not found and rescued you, you might not be here to-day. There is no telling what might have happened to you had you been left helpless in the custody of the pair of scoundrels who had you in that shack. I repeat that you owe that thousand dollars as fairly as you ever owed a penny in your life!"

"Well, then, I'll pay it," assented Theodore Dodge reluctantly, after some hesitation. "I am afraid my wife will oppose it, however."

"You can tell Mrs. Dodge just what I've said, or I'll tell her, if you prefer."

"Will you attend, Ripley, to rewarding all the boys for their gallant conduct in rescuing my daughter?"

"Yes; if you'll leave the matter wholly in my hands, and agree not to interfere."

Theodore Dodge agreed to this, and Lawyer Ripley went ahead. The legal gentleman, however, had a more difficult time than he had expected. It took a lot of argument, and more than one meeting, to make Dick & Co. agree to accept anything whatever.

It was at last settled, however, Mr. Ripley urging upon the young men that they had no right to slight their own future prospects or education by refusing to "lay by" money to which they were honestly entitled, when it came

in the form of an earned reward from a citizen amply able to pay the reward.

So Dick and Dave received that thousand dollars, which, of course, they divided evenly.

In addition, each member of Dick & Co. received one hundred dollars for his prompt and gallant work in rescuing Grace Dodge from death.

Of course Bert, away at private school with Bayliss, heard all about the rescue. It is not a matter of record, however, that Bert ever wrote a letter thanking any member of Dick & Co. for saving his sister.

CHAPTER XXV

Postscript

WHEN the next commencement swung around Fred Ripley, who had managed to "go straight" all through his senior year, was among those graduated. What became of him will yet be learned by our readers in another volume.

There are a host of other Gridley fellows also to be accounted for.

Their part in the subsequent history of Gridley, and of the world in general, will also yet be told, all in the proper place.

"Prin.," too, may yet come in for some attention.

Dick & Co. did not take part in basket ball nor any of the organized winter athletics, though they kept constantly in training. But these young men realized that the High School is, first of all, a place for academic training; so, after the football season had ended so gloriously, they went back to their books with renewed vigor.

Laura and Belle, as they neared the end of their junior year, went almost from girlhood into womanhood, as is the way with girls.

Yet neither Miss Meade nor Miss Bentley found Dick or Dave "too young" for their frank, girlish admiration.

"You see, Dick, that we were quite right about you and Dave having all the grit that goes with the highest needs of the military profession," Laura remarked. "Your conduct at the fire shows the stuff that would be displayed by Dick & Co. in leading a charge in battle, if need be."

"I guess a reasonable amount of courage, under stress, is the possession of nearly all members of the human race," laughed young Prescott.

Here we shall leave our Gridley friends for a short time. We shall meet them all again,

however, in the forthcoming and final volume of this series, which will be published under the title:

"The High School Captain of the Team; Or, Dick & Co. Leading the Athletic Vanguard."

In this new volume we shall see more of the boys' qualities in leadership.

Before we meet our popular boys in high school again the reader will find the long succession of wonderful events of their summer vacation following their junior year in the last two volumes of the "High School Boys' Vacation Series," which are published under the titles, "The High School Boys' Fishing Trip; Or, Dick & Co. in the Wilderness," and "The High School Boys' Training Hike; Or, Making Themselves 'Hard as Nails.'"

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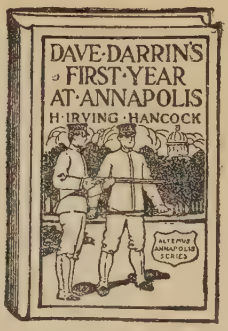

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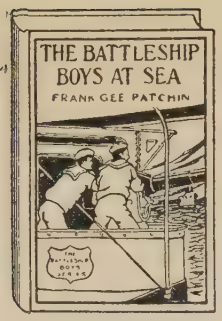

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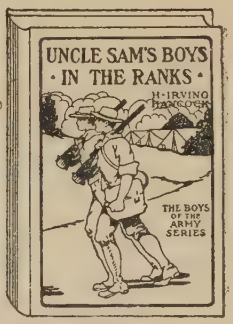

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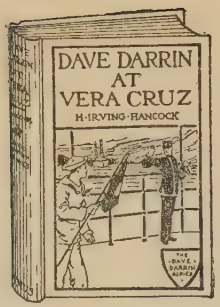

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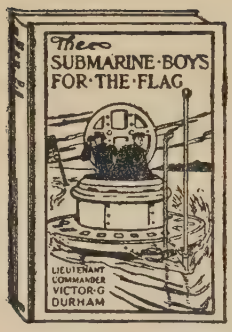

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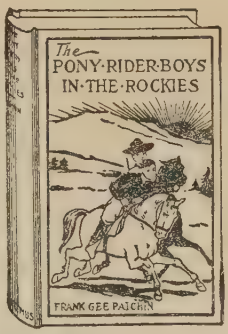

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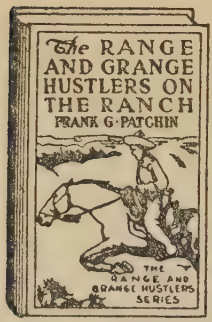

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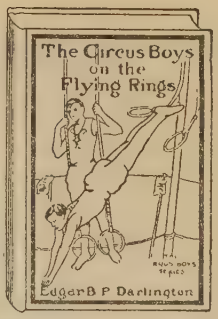

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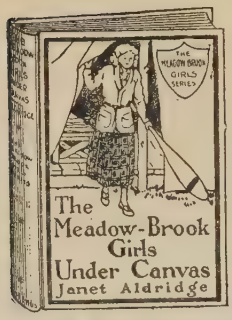

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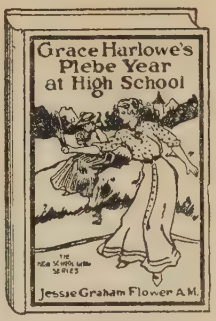

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